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# This Absolutely Wonderful Race

*In February the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism devoted a First Amendment Leadership Breakfast to a discussion of the issues raised by James Fallows in his book *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*. Walter Isaacson, managing editor of Time magazine, was a panelist. His remarks are excerpted here:*

The last time I appeared before this group I had just been made editor of New Media at Time Warner and I had one of these topics that was something like, "Cyberspace: Threat or Menace?" Great unanswerable questions. It's nice to have an answerable question, a question like "Is journalism broken?" because the answer is pretty simple — it's yes. A slightly longer answer would be, yes, badly.

I think what's happened is that over the past ten, fifteen years we've lost our credibility and our authority. The only thing we bring to market is our credibility and our authority, and once that's become even a little eroded, the product has less value. One thing that has helped cause this problem is that we've gotten into the habit, perhaps since the glory days of the civil rights coverage and Vietnam coverage and Watergate, of treating every issue that comes along as either a potential scandal or a political battle. Be it health care or free trade or the flat tax or anything else, instead of analyzing the topic seriously, we find that it's a little bit easier for us to seem like we're being objective and wise by saying, "How does this affect the Dole campaign? How does this affect the Buchanan campaign?"

However, here's the good news: this political race is absolutely wonderful. It's a big campaign about big ideas, serious ideas, and important ideas. It's about the role of federal government in our society and about how long the Republican revolution is going to extend. It's about taxes and protectionism and free trade and, most fundamentally of all, it's about the new economy, a new economy that's marked by globalization; about a new information age; about stockholders who control the way corporations have to run.

These are issues that cause anxiety, but they're also issues worth exploring, and they can't be broken down into point/counterpoints or quick, easy assessments of who is helped politically. And I do think that with this campaign you are starting to see, I hope, a much better job at covering the important issues that are involved in this race.

We have to look at how you find the common ground in America, the common facts that people can use in arguments. But also, instead of presenting everything as dissent, we have to occasionally try to do something like promote understand-

ing and even promote a consensus that may be emerging. I think as we do that we gain a little bit of our credibility and a little bit of our authority back, and perhaps play the role in democracy that journalism has been expected to play.

I think it's understandable that the press has focused on the process of getting elected because the process can be very interesting. This began with Teddy White making the inner game of politics, and the struggle of both the advisers and the candidates to wage a crusade, into something that approached a wonderful, narrative tale. And so, I think we shouldn't apologize for covering that part of it. I mean, James Carville and George Stephanopoulos in the war room is interesting, and it's a good tale.

I do, however, think that this can lead to increasing cynicism. Because it makes everything in politics look like just tactics in a game. So we have to try to keep in mind that sometimes elections, especially this year, especially given this economy and this environment, sometimes elections are about bigger things than who can get the ad on most quickly, or whether a negative ad was able to counter a positive ad, or how you're going to spin something after a debate. Sometimes it's about more than just advisers and pollsters. Sometimes it's about the ideas as well. I think some of us have tried to, for example, look at Steve Forbes's ideas, his background, his thinking, and quit trying to predict whether he's going to win Arizona or not.

In an article in *Foreign Affairs* called "What is America's Soft Power in the World?" Joseph Nye contrasts "soft power" with the hard power of military strength and, for that matter, tariffs and economic muscle. The soft power arises from the ideas and information that come from the United States, ideas that have a certain bit of credibility and that reflect the values that the world would like to emulate. That source of power comes partly through the authority and credibility of those of us in journalism and, for that matter, in any form of the media or telecommunication in which we're disseminating information. And I think as we become more cynical about our institutions here, we also risk people around the world becoming more cynical about the true power and values of the American society.

I believe very strongly that the American democratic system works, can work. I believe in the values that are basically the core values of people in this nation. And I don't believe we should be ashamed to embrace the democratic system. Good journalism is a part of the democratic system, because democracy depends on having a common body of credible information.

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# LETTERS

## FLYING HIGH

When I was a young boy growing up in the Low Country of South Carolina, sometimes in the late afternoons we'd go out in the backyard and watch the jets from Shaw Air Force Base fly over our farm. It was magical. It seemed they came from nowhere, right into our backyard sky, and what we were watching and listening for was to see if they would break the sound barrier. When one did, as I recall, my sister and brother and I would jump around in the euphoria of just having been part of something wonderful.

Going through Katherine Fulton's piece this afternoon ("A Tour of Our Uncertain Future," CJR, March/April), and having spent hundreds of hours and night-time conversations on-line recently, I know for sure that she just broke through a mind barrier. And I'm jumping around. Thanks.

VAN KING  
Greensboro, N.C.

## FOSTERING SUSPICIONS

Trudy Lieberman's piece on the Vince Foster story (CJR, March/April), which attempts to build a case that a huge right-wing conspiracy is under way to promote the "dark view of Foster's death," focuses largely on my work. But Lieberman never details my reporting on what she calls the "dark view" and omits any facts that support the notion that there are serious questions about the death.

Strange that, in a story on the "Foster Factory," CJR doesn't bother to tell its readers any of the original reporting that factory has produced. For example, there are dozens and dozens of inconsistencies in the alleged suicide, but just look at the evidence surrounding the 1913 Colt revolver found at Foster's side, neatly in his hand. Homicide experts say the gun rarely remains in the suicide's hand and is cause for suspicion. The gun had none of Foster's fingerprints on it. No one in the neighborhood heard the shot. The bullet was never found despite three federal searches. The Foster family has never

positively identified the gun as even being owned by Foster. No matching ammo was found in his home. The gun had no visible blowback on it. And FBI lab evidence of powder burns on Foster's hands demonstrates, according to seven leading experts, that Foster would have fired the gun with neither hand on the gun's grip — which they say is not consistent with suicide.

Lieberman's piece suggests that I misrepresented Foster being left-handed. She fails to note that it was a *Boston Globe* story in March 1994 that indicated Foster was left-handed. Much later in my reporting I made reference to that issue based on that report, but the focus of my work, as anyone who read my work would see, has been the forensic evidence relating to the powder burns.

Lieberman apparently followed *60 Minutes'* coverage, as desperate as they were to knock my reporting by pinning this factual error about the left-hand issue on me.

CHRISTOPHER RUDDY  
Greensburg, Pa.

Trudy Lieberman replies: *The piece was a report on the workings of the Western Journalism Center, not a critical analysis of Ruddy's work. The sole reason for mentioning the misrepresentation of Vince Foster's left-handedness was to show that the Center, which proclaims itself a champion of independent reporting, continued to circulate sinister suggestions about Foster's death that were drawn from false information long after that information was known to be false.*

Lieberman engages in the sort of counter-investigative reporting that has been the typical liberal/centrist journalistic response to Whitewater: don't report the bad news, rather expose those bringing it.

Well, sorry to say, in this case the conservative media have been miles ahead of the mainstream press, the latter having done a worse job of reporting Whitewater than any story I've seen in nearly forty years of journalism. As a progressive alternative journalist opposed to much of what



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the conservative media stand for, I'm not happy that it broke this way. Still, it was clear from early 1992 that the Clintons would not comfortably bear deep looking into. I decided to follow the story and not my druthers. I recommend it to others. It would improve the trade immeasurably.

SAM SMITH  
Editor  
*The Progressive Review*  
Washington, D.C.

## DUBIOUS DISTINCTION

Your Dart to ABC News [for a misleading report — and misleading correction of that report — during the week before the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, which said that Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu had called Rabin a "traitor"] did a considerable disservice to contextual accuracy. Rabin's widow has made many public references to the inflammatory rhetoric of Likud, denouncing the excesses of its leadership which, in her estimation, created the atmosphere, the cultural ambience, that led to her husband's murder. One allegation is that a placard containing the word "traitor" appeared at a meeting addressed by Netanyahu and he did nothing to denounce it or to demand its removal.

Journalism would be far better served if you pursued *that* story, rather than taking potshots at the most internationally sophisticated nightly newscast to be seen on American television.

RON HAGGART  
Toronto, Ontario

## FAMILIARITY BREEDS ...

Christopher Hanson laments Hollywood's changing portrayal of journalists ("Where Have All the Heroes Gone?" CJR, March/April). It is an interesting read, but it seems to miss one of the major explanations of why the shift has occurred.

In "the good old days" reporters were largely anonymous working stiffs doing a job. The public knew very few of them and so Hollywood could easily fabricate a noble stereotype. Today, thanks to television, reporters seem ubiquitous. They have faces. They have become "personalities," often more famous for being famous than for their work. Salaries that once paralleled those of their readers have exploded to a much greater differential for the most visible practitioners. It is very difficult to fashion screen myths of such a known, privileged set.

BOB ROEHR  
Washington, D.C.

## TRAVEL OFFICE TRAVALS

As a former member of the White House travel office, I was more than fascinated by Joe Conason's recent article (CJR, March/April). I was particularly amused by the title, "Travelgate: What the Press Suppressed," since the opening paragraph of the article clearly indicates that the suppresser was Conason, and the resulting casualty was the truth.

Conason makes a major charge of wrongdoing on the part of the office in not awarding press charters to the lowest bidder. Price has never been the determining factor in the contract awards of press charters because the funds used are not, nor have they ever been, government funds — they are corporate funds provided by the various news organizations, the use of which was never restricted in any way to being awarded to the lowest bidder. Conason also takes issue with our "catering faithfully to the needs and desires of the White House press" when in fact that was our assignment.

With regard to the "whistleblower letter," Conason insists that its writer was identified by a GAO witness as a member of our office and, in violation of federal law, fired by Dale for writing the letter. In fact, the named individual, when informed that he had been so identified before a congressional committee, informed the chairman that he in no way was involved in writing the letter. Moreover, he was not fired. He retired from government service and completely supported Billy Dale in his handling of the office.

The next area of fiction on Conason's part that I found particularly objectionable is his charge — which would be a violation of law on our part — that we participated in "... a more questionable travel office practice — looking the other way when reporters avoid taxes and duties on goods from around the world." It would not have taken much effort for Conason to find out that all travelers with the press office are provided standard U.S. Customs declarations which require them to list all purchases made overseas. Prior to landing in the U.S. these forms are collected and processed by the only person authorized to do so, and that is a U.S. customs agent on board the aircraft. A U.S. customs agent has always traveled on the press plane. At no time has a member of the travel office been assigned the responsibilities of a customs agent.

Also in the article, Conason points the finger of guilt at Billy Dale because, when faced with legal fees that were estimated to run between \$400,000 and \$500,000, Dale and his attorney offered to pay the \$69,000 he was charged with embezzling, in hopes

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of saving his family from financial ruin — without admitting guilt. This was completely clarified by Judge Kessler when she told the jury that unless the prosecution showed that any of the money that Dale was charged with embezzling was used for his personal gain, their only verdict could be not guilty.

Moreover, I take issue with Conason's use of the KPMG Peat Marwick report, which was not an official audit.

Finally, I would add a personal note to one aspect in particular and that is regarding access to, and the disappearance of, White House travel office files during the weeks before and after our firing. I was away on May 19, 1993, when the firings were announced, and, as a result, was directed to report on May 24 to the office of David Watkins at the White House to be terminated.

When I entered the travel office on that day to pick up my personal effects, I found between twelve and fifteen people, none that I could identify, and not one of them with a White House security pass. Some were seated at desks, while others were going through the office files. I would like to be able to say that my concern at that time was for Billy Dale, but it was not. Make no mistake, it was for myself. I realized that any record or file that I might need to defend myself against any charges that might be made against me were completely accessible to anyone in that office and were not being safeguarded in any manner, nor would they be for the next twenty-two days. In addition, I found that all of my personal possessions — trip photos, personal letters, address books, travel vouchers — thirteen years worth of my life at the White House had been thrown out. The unit in which we each had personal assigned space for such storage had been dismantled and was in the middle of the office with a sign on it that said "Out."

JOHN P. MCSWEENEY  
Broad Run, Va.

Joe Conason replies: First, I want to state again that treatment accorded McSweeney and the other travel office employees, with the exception of Billy Dale, was deplorable. That has nothing to do with my criticisms of press coverage of "Travelgate," most of which McSweeney either misunderstands or does not address at all.

The press charters ought to have been bid out because the travel office employees were government workers running a government agency, even though they were spending the money of news organizations. That is not merely my opinion; it is the view of the General Accounting Office as expressed in a 1994 report on the office. The contracts need not have been given to the lowest bidder, but

# PRIVATIZATION

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*the contracts should have been competitive to prevent sweetheart deals.*

*I took no exception to the fact that the travel office employees were expected to "cater" to the White House press — but it does explain why the press corps took such a one-sided view of the dismissals.*

*My account of the travel office whistleblower came from a 1989 White House memo of an interview with Billy Dale, in which Dale said he knew the identity of the staffer who had made corruption charges, and that he intended to dismiss that person. Nowhere did I quote a "GAO witness" about this matter, as McSweeney wrongly suggests.*

*As for the customs issue, I simply cited accounts which appeared in publications such as Time, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and The Christian Science Monitor. As federal employees, the travel office workers were required to report any customs violations they witnessed.*

*On the question of Dale's trial, I found a general reluctance to report not only the failed plea bargain but also other evidence that suggested mismanagement and worse on his part. The verdict in his favor doesn't retrospectively change any of the facts brought out by the prosecution which ought to have been reported.*

*The Peat Marwick report found the travel office in utter financial disarray. That Dale was depositing reimbursed funds in his personal bank account — an undisputed fact — offers some sense of how he ran his agency, regardless of any later claims about purloined records. Still, McSweeney and his colleagues have my sympathy, if not my agreement.*

## HOW NOT TO PEDDLER A PAPER

CJR's analysis of the foibles at *The Miami Herald* (January/February) was right on in many ways. Growing up reading the *Herald* was one of the experiences that led me to go into journalism. Sadly, today, I refuse to read it.

The paper panders not so much to advertisers but to individual groups that advertisers want to reach. Each of the diverse groups that make up Miami is represented by a columnist: that is, there is the African-American columnist, a couple of Hispanic columnists, and even a Sunday columnist aimed at the substantial elderly population still in town. Each columnist follows the conventional wisdom as though given a handbook; the elderly-oriented columnist discusses the good old days of South Florida, the African-American columnist

rails against the evil white majority, and the Latin columnists keep reaching for the image of the bubbling pot of black beans. It's almost a parody; a James Watt-inspired collection of people who just fit the politically correct bill.

Unfortunately this editorial policy conflicts with the hard news happening in the community.

MICHAEL W. SASSER  
North Miami, Fla.

## HEADS UP

That's an amusing title you came up with for my article about China's Xinhua News Agency ("I Was a 'Polisher' in a Chinese News Factory," CJR, March/April). A good title for another piece, perhaps.

I wrote what I thought was a serious, if not humorless, article about China's Xinhua News Agency — a critical assessment of one part of a huge operation. The title trivializes the piece and sets the wrong tone. With its "I Was . . ." construction, it also puts words in my mouth. I don't call Xinhua a "news factory."

I assume that the editors were just trying to coax readers who normally shy away from foreign-press pieces into taking a look at this one. My fear is that the title will make it all too easy for Xinhua's top brass — not to mention journalists and academics in China and elsewhere — to dismiss the piece out of hand: If the editors themselves treat the article as a joke, why should we take it seriously?

JON SWAN  
Aardenhout, The Netherlands

## REVELATION

The angst of editors and reporters ("Playing God in the Newsroom," CJR, January/February) over whether to do stories about the desperately ill who lack money for life-saving medical procedures seems to me wholly needless.

Why can't papers run a standard feature briefly listing all such doctor-verified cases in the community or region, concisely spelling out the need in each case? No more "playing God" picking and choosing cases deemed worthy of being turned into "stories." Just a bulletin-board accounting of this ongoing scandal in our so-called civilized country where people are allowed to face death because they can't afford readily available lifesaving medical treatment. Let the scandal all hang out, every day.

FRANK N. MEGARTEE  
Salisbury, Md.

**CORRECTION** An item in the March/April Darts & Laurels column mistakenly placed the Edmonton Journal in the Canadian province of Ontario instead of in Alberta, where it remains to this day. We regret the error and apologize particularly to the many readers to the north who took the trouble to point it out.

**CLARIFICATION** An alert reader points out that the Soundbite on page 14 of the March/April issue, which CJR excerpted from a speech delivered by Gannett c.e.o. John J. Curley in Washington on January 18, 1996, is nearly identical to a passage in a speech delivered by South African president F.W. de Klerk in 1994 and excerpted on the July 24 page of the Freedom Forum's First Amendment calendar for 1995. When asked for clarification, Curley called CJR's attention to a similar speech he delivered in Arlington on October 16, 1995, in which the very same passage appeared. In that speech, the passage was attributed to de Klerk.

**NOTE TO READERS** To be considered for publication, all letters to the editor, whether sent by post or e-mail, must include the sender's full name, street address, and telephone number.

## NEW ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

CJR invites readers with World Wide Web access to explore two new features on our site (<http://www.cjr.org>).

- *Cyberresources*, a section devoted to on-line resources for journalists, debuts with *COVERING TOBACCO*, Rebecca Perl's comprehensive guide for covering every angle of the tobacco story, which appeared in the March/April 1995 CJR, updated with new sources, Internet links, and e-mail addresses.

- CJR also introduces the first in a series of *War Stories*, multimedia records of the profession's history, with Ben Bagdikian's tales of the Pentagon papers and a week spent undercover in the Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, State Correctional Institution (see page 15). Both stories are enhanced with sound files and photographs.

- Finally, CJR continues to build on its on-line link with the Pulitzer Prizes. All winning exhibits will be posted on the site in June.

# WHOWHATWHENWHEREWHY



John McAleenan is a newshound of the old school. In 1967, while reporting for Gannett's Cocoa, Florida, *Today* newspaper, he swiped a press packet outlining plans for Disney World — two days before a scheduled announcement — and earned plaudits for scooping the hometown *Orlando Sentinel*. A dozen years later, as a columnist and feature writer for *The Detroit News*, McAleenan waltzed into the Chicago residence of the accused serial killer John Wayne Gacy. The police, who had not finished with their investigation, arrested McAleenan as he was heading out the door. But the *News* was so pleased with his doggedness that they had him bailed out within the hour and nominated him for a Pulitzer Prize for his Gacy coverage. When he returned to Chicago for a hearing that cleared him, he was put up in the tony Palmer House.

On January 30, 1996, the sixty-two-year-old

McAleenan was back writing features and columns at *Florida Today* (the renamed *Cocoa Today*, now based in Melbourne). The 80,000-circulation paper, a forerunner of Gannett's *USA Today* that was voted the chain's "Best Newspaper of the Year" in 1994, devotes much of its local coverage to crime and fires. And that morning McAleenan's editor asked him to work with Kathy Reakes, forty, the paper's police reporter, checking out the poor

neighborhood where several people had been arrested days before in connection with an unusual murder.

At the suspects' apartment, the reporters say, they found the back door open, with no police tape in sight, and the apartment itself trashed. They walked in. Having been told by neighbors that one of the murder suspects had operated a teenage crime ring out of the apartment, McAleenan was intrigued by a piece of paper that appeared to have

telephone and pager numbers on it, and he put it in his pocket. "We could have sat down and copied it," he says. "It didn't occur to me." He scooped up several other pieces of paper and the pair left, excited with their find.

After a celebratory lunch, McAleenan and Reakes returned to the office and worked the phones past deadline, drawing on the information they found in the apartment, as well as material from an informant. They pieced together a tale of sex and murder, burglary and insurance fraud, child abuse and bogus-check cashing, and a Dickensian den of young thieves. "It was a really great story," Reakes says. They realized more work would be needed the next day to tie up the loose ends before they could write. On the way out of the office, Reakes crowded about their foray into the apartment.

The elation was short-lived. Late that night, McAleenan and Reakes got calls at home from executive

## forgive us our trespasses in one door, out another at florida today

editor Judy P. Christie, informing them that they were suspended immediately for "a significant breach of journalistic ethics" that might also be "a criminal act." Further, if they did not "notify the appropriate police agency that you went into the apartment" by 10 A.M. the next day, "we will notify the police." McAleenan and Reakes were advised by a lawyer they consulted not to contact the authorities, and did not. The next day, they were handed memos repeating the previous night's conversations and were summarily fired — without being given an opportunity to explain themselves, they say.

Reakes says she was crushed by the dismissal, having worked her way up from clerk to reporter over nine years with the paper. "My shock over the whole

matter was the way we were treated by the paper," she says, adding that her greatest regret was that the story she was fired for was never published. McAleenan, a colorful, long-haired surfer who has worked for Gannett papers for more than fifteen years, was unabashed. "We trespassed and we took something in the course of that trespass," he says, although "it didn't seem like I was violating anything" since the apartment was not a police crime scene. He calls the firing an "overzealous" reaction. Similar stunts had resulted in reporting coups that won him praise. "Maybe when I wasn't looking the rules changed a little bit, and nobody told me," he says.

Maybe that's it. A veteran *Florida Today* reporter, Billy Cox, calls the firings "the most divisive event that

I've seen in twenty years," adding, "Our managers won't back us up. . . . We don't know what the rules are." And Joe Saltzman, professor of journalism at the University of Southern California, sees the episode as "an extreme example of what is going on today in America. There's no question that the aggressive investigative reporter of the past is going to become extinct, because the people running newspapers are becoming more and more corporate. They're business people, not journalists. They're afraid of lawsuits, they're afraid of offending the public and their advertisers."

Melinda Meers, *Florida Today*'s managing editor, declined to comment on "personnel issues" involving the reporters. "The newsroom is grieving over the

loss of John and Kathy," she says. "Newsrooms are very tight places, and whenever anyone leaves we're sad about it." As for the reporters' offense, she acknowledges that the paper has "no specific written guidelines about entering people's houses," but says the assumption was that reporters would not trespass. (Ruling that the two reporters were entitled to unemployment compensation, the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security declared in McAleenan's case that while he "exhibited poor judgment in an isolated instance, no information has been received that clearly substantiates misconduct.")

At the time of the firing, editors seized the documents they believed had been removed from the apartment — McAleenan and Reakes

## the millennium news by JESSE TERRIER

IT BEGAN  
FOUR YEARS  
AGO WITH  
THE VILLAGE  
VOICE.  
THEY STARTED  
GIVING THE  
PAPER AWAY  
FREE.

IS THIS  
THE END  
OF THE  
VOICE?  
PEOPLE  
WONDERED.

BUT NO...  
TWO  
YEARS  
LATER  
THE  
LA.  
TIMES  
WENT  
FREE.

NINE MONTHS  
AFTER THAT,  
THE WASHINGTON  
POST.

AND YESTERDAY, THE  
ANNOUNCEMENT CAME DOWN  
FROM THE N.Y. TIMES.  
THE TIMES IS  
GOING FREE!

CAN  
YOU  
BELIEVE  
THAT  
IN THE  
YEAR  
2000,  
ALL  
THREE  
PAPERS  
ARE  
FREE?

ON  
THE  
OTHER  
HAND...

YOU GET  
WHAT YOU  
PAY FOR.

say that in their haste the editors took the wrong papers — and Gannett lawyers, concerned over jeopardy to suspects' rights, turned the documents over to a judge and asked that they be inspected in secret. That motion "doesn't make much sense" in light of the paper's newsgathering role, Meers acknowledges. And it was too much for *Florida Today*'s court reporter, Maurice Tamman, who stood up and, "in the interest of all journalists," objected to his paper's motion. "It was a bizarre situation," he recalls. "I wanted that envelope opened in court." The judge referred the envelope to the grand jury, which found that the contents had no bearing on the criminal case.

**Mark I. Pinsky**  
Pinsky covers religion for the Orlando Sentinel.

## where's the sunshine? closing the door on open meetings

After years of quietly circumventing the so-called Sunshine Act, a 1976 law mandating open meetings, federal regulators are growing bolder.

Take Marc Lincoln Marks, a Clinton appointee to the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission, for example. Marks decided early in 1995 that candid discussions could not occur at open meetings, so he stopped going. Instead, he circulates memos and holds permissible one-on-one private sessions with the other commissioners.

Similar strategies, including deputizing aides to meet in a commissioner's stead, are employed at the several dozen regulatory agencies most affected by the Sunshine Act. Commissioners say they are fearful that voicing preliminary, argumentative, or exaggerated views could be embarrassing or confusing to the public, or upsetting to financial markets.

Securities and Exchange Commissioner Steve Wallman was so convinced that permitting more private meetings would improve communication among commissioners, and thus improve policy-making, that he persuaded the Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS), a tiny government body dedicated to improving government processes, to create a special committee to examine his contentions. Just before Congress put ACUS out of business last fall, the committee endorsed a number of them.

"Generally, true collective decision-making does not occur at agency public meetings," it concluded. It called for a five- to seven-year "pilot program" in which Congress would let agencies meet privately without advance notice, provided that they released detailed minutes within five days and took most final actions in open session.

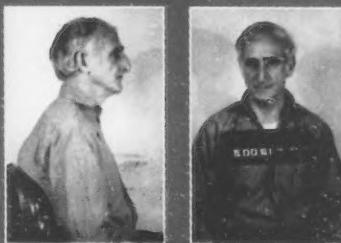
"I'm not happy about it," says Lucy Dalglish, former chair of the National Freedom of Information Committee of the Society of Professional Journalists. "What they missed is the lack of effort among people in the federal government to



I'm not happy about it," says Lucy Dalglish, former chair of the National Freedom of Information Committee of the Society of Professional Journalists.

"What they missed is the lack of effort among people in the federal government to

## soundbite



"So I went inside. My cover name was Benjamin Barsamian. I wanted to have everything as close to reality as possible. Once you're inside, boy, the outside world disappears very fast. I realized there were, how many? — only eight people in the world who knew I was in that prison and none of them were in that prison. The warden didn't know, the other prisoners didn't know. At one point, when we were talking about that, the deputy attorney said, 'Well, now, in case there's a riot in the prison, can't Ben go to the warden and say, 'Look, I'm not really a prisoner, I'm a reporter?' And the head of corrections said, 'Sure, he can do that. They'll just ship him off to a mental hospital!'"

*Ben Bagdikian, from his account of a week he spent undercover in Pennsylvania's Huntingdon State Correctional Institution in 1971. His story is the first in a CJR series of "War Stories" from veteran journalists, and it appears in full on CJR's Web site (<http://www.cjr.org>), augmented with sound files and photographs.*

PENNSYLVANIA BUREAU OF CORRECTIONS

make the Sunshine Act work."

Even at agencies apparently prospering in the sunshine, such as the Consumer Product Safety Commission, there exists latent desire for change. Initial inquiries to a CPSC public affairs official elicited pride in the agency's "goldfish bowl" policies, but a subsequent statement by the chairwoman, Ann Brown, concluded that the act limits open discussion — "a fact which can sometimes impede good decision making."

Many reporters who cover regulatory agencies say that most open meetings now resemble scripted scenes. Prepared statements precede planned motions and predictable votes. Some say they go mostly for the occasional candid moments or flashes of debate that il-

luminate official thinking, or for staff briefings after a meeting is over.

Sunshine Act critics argue that if the act is being ignored, and can't be enforced, it might as well be changed. Alan Morrison, for one, a Ralph Nader associate who has litigated many open-government cases and served on the ACUS panel, has concluded that the act is "a charade," and he concurs in the panel's recommendations.

Absent an open spirit among officials, there seem to be few ways to enforce the act, except perhaps by congressional oversight and news media attention. Ellen E. Smith, publisher of *Mine Safety and Health News*, has followed the story, filed requests for MSHR commissioner Marks's memos, and threatened a lawsuit. She has also drawn atten-

tion to the views of former MSHR chairwoman Arlene Holen, who told Smith: "Openness promotes accountability and responsibility. Open, rational discussion inhibits improper wheeling and dealing, and the consideration of matters that are not on the record or consideration of politics."

The rekindled debate about sunsetting the Sunshine Act has barely reached Capitol Hill, but the House Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology was expected to look at the act this spring as part of a series of hearings on federal information policies.

*Toby McIntosh*

*McIntosh is managing editor of Daily Report for Executives, a publication of the Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.*

## soundbite

"In short, at no time — even to the point of entering a permanent injunction after two temporary restraining orders — did the District Court appear to realize that it was engaging in a practice that, under all but the most exceptional circumstances, violates the Constitution: preventing a news organization from publishing information in its possession on a matter of public concern."

*The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, reversing a lower court's order barring Business Week from publishing an article based on sealed court documents in a suit by Procter & Gamble against Banker's Trust.*

## the palestinian news game

*walking on eggs in the arafat era*

**W**hat he did "wasn't a crime," says Maher Al-Alami, managing editor of the largest Palestinian newspaper, the East Jerusalem *Al-Quds*. "Editors have the right to evaluate the importance of the story or news."

He was talking about his decision in December on how to play a story comparing Yasser Arafat to the seventh-century conqueror of Jerusalem, Caliph Omar: on an inside page instead of page one, in defiance of the layout instructions dictated over the phone by one of Arafat's assistants. Al-Alami was detained by Palestinian security officials for five days, and was ultimately

brought before the PLO chairman himself. The editor says Arafat listened to his reasons for playing the story inside: the front page was almost entirely taken up by candidates' election ads — it was the month before Arafat's formal election as president of the Palestinian Authority — and the lead news element was Arafat's visit to Bethlehem with an accompanying color photo. After hearing the explanation, the chairman kissed him three times on the head, Al-Alami recalls, and said, "I'm sorry. I don't like to arrest my brothers."

Perhaps. But since Arafat assumed power as head of the Palestinian Authority in May

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1994, the security forces have made more than thirty arrests of journalists and editors of all political leanings. Detentions have lasted from several hours to a few weeks.

Although they have been almost completely freed from the Israeli yoke of military censorship, Palestinian journalists are being fettered in new ways. Reporters Sans Frontiers, a watchdog group based in Paris, released a report at the end of 1995 deplored the Palestinian Authority's policy of suspending newspapers and employing threats and violence against journalists. It also criticized the press law issued last year, which prohibits publication of everything from security secrets to immoral or blasphemous material.

Bassam Eid, a Palestinian investigator for the highly regarded Israeli human rights organization B'tselem and a representative of Reporters Sans

Frontiers in Jerusalem, finds editors from the Palestinian newspapers despondent and fearful. "I criticize Palestinian journalists — Why don't you stand up and defend your rights?" he says. "But Palestinian journalists say they don't

nalism, and publishes only what Eid calls "vegetarian" criticism of the regime.

As Al-Alami of *Al-Quds* acknowledges, "We aren't sending material to the Palestinian censorship because we haven't such a thing. But on the other

united behind Arafat both in condemning the killing of civilians and in lambasting Israel for its crackdowns in Palestinian areas.

"During a sensitive period like this, we know there are human rights violations right and left by Israel and the Palestinian Authority — but can we really be outspoken in our criticism?" asks Hanna Siniora, publisher of the English-language weekly *The Jerusalem Times*, which in the past accused the Palestinian Authority of human-rights abuses. "In principle we have to, but we feel that keeping law and order is also important."

*The Jerusalem Times* does not receive funding from the Palestinian Authority, but many other dailies do. Pinhas Inbari, a senior investigator for Peace Watch, an Israeli organization that monitors adherence to the Oslo accords, says Arafat and his circle manipulate publishers

## S o u n d b i t e

"The best part of my job is writing an occasional sentence that perfectly describes what I have seen or heard. Writing a perfect sentence is hard. Writing two in a row is nearly impossible."

*Joe Klein of Newsweek, answering a question from Glenbrook South High School, in Glenview, Illinois, in the Correspondence with Correspondents part of PBS's on-line Democracy Project on the World Wide Web (<http://www.pbs.org>).*

want to be arrested and what you're calling for is to throw ourselves into the fire."

The result is a tame, compliant press that relies on WAFA, the official Palestinian news agency, for reports on Arafat and the Palestinian Authority's policy, rarely engages in investigative jour-

hand, we have self-censorship."

As of March, amid the tumult surrounding the suicide bombings in Israel, two opposition weeklies, affiliated with the Hamas and Islamic Jihad, had closed, leaving only the mainstream Palestinian media to cover the terror's aftermath. They stood

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## soundbite

"News people admire people on the outside who come forward with unpopular views, who want to make something better. But if you're on the inside and you raise a serious question about news, they don't embrace you. They don't admire you. They think you're a traitor."

*Bernard Goldberg of CBS News, quoted in February in The Washington Post. He was responding to criticism by his CBS colleagues of a Wall Street Journal essay he wrote, in which he accused the "media elite" — and specifically CBS's Eric Engberg — of liberal bias.*

through financial dependency, routinely interfering with editorial policy.

Still, not everyone sees a totally grim picture.

"I think the Palestinian Authority has been schizophrenic regarding freedom of expression," says Daoud Kuttab, who was fired from *Al-Quds* in 1994 after signing a petition against a ban on the rival *An-Nahar*. "It's a fact that they've allowed new papers to open. It's a fact that there's no censorship. Unfortunately, it's also a fact that some papers have been closed and some journalists arrested."

The Voice of Palestine radio station is often praised for its interviews with opposition figures and its call-in talk shows, which provide diverse opinions. But public TV is widely ridiculed for its excessive coverage of Arafat's activities. Radwan Abu Ayyash, Chairman of the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC),

which runs both TV and radio, says it is too early to write off the TV channel.

"This is the beginning," he says, "My ambition is to reach civilized, accurate programming. This needs some time and nobody's giving us time."

In February, the Palestinian Authority restored PBC's monopoly, shutting down more than a dozen low-powered TV stations in the West Bank. Arabic-language Israeli broadcasts and others from abroad provide some alternative to the PBC, but the situation leaves many Palestinians dissatisfied. Hopeful that the new legislative council will pass a law authorizing private TV stations and in general protect journalists, Kuttab says, "We have a freer press than most Arab countries, but we're not anywhere close to the U.S. or Israel."

*Leora Frankel-Shlosberg  
Frankel-Shlosberg is a free-lance writer based in Jerusalem.*

## Campaign '96

*Say your editor wants to know how the local pols voted on the farm subsidy bill. What farm bill? Or she sends you to Texas for a mood piece and you know zilch about politics there. Say it's late, your library is closed, and your calls are going nowhere.*

*This may help. Here are more campaign-related sources from the Internet's World Wide Web (see "The Virtual Trail," CJR, January/February). Some will provide answers. Others will give you tips, ideas, telephone numbers, contacts. Many are like vines, continually leading to others. Some are worth following; others will need pruning.*

**Everyday, irregardless of his homework,  
Jeffrey went "rollerblading" because it  
was to nice to lay around with his nose  
in a english book.**

Of the 7 errors in this headline, "rollerblading" as a verb strikes us as most extreme. Other common misuses of the Rollerblade brand name include "rollerblades, rollerbladers, blades, bladers and blading." Remember, the careful writer skates on in-line skates known as Rollerblade® skates.



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## CYBERSOURCES: MORE FROM THE VIRTUAL TRAIL

### Campaigns

Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government offers a good starting point for finding political links — ranging from advocacy groups to think tanks — with its Online Political Information Network (<http://ksgwww.harvard.edu/~ksgpress/opinhome.htm>).

For information on presidential candidates, try their Web sites: Dole (<http://www.dole96.com>), Buchanan (<http://www.buchanan.org/index.shtml>), and President Clinton (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>).

ElectNet (<http://www.el.com/GOV/home.htm>) has information on state politics, mostly through Web sites for candidates but also updates on local issues. You click on a map of the United States and go from there.

### Campaign Finance

The Federal Election Commission (<http://www.fec.gov>) offers background on campaign funding laws, and data on candidates and political action committees.

For another look at campaign spending, try the Web site operated by *Mother Jones* magazine and the Center for Responsive Politics. Called "The Coin-Op Congress," it includes information on top contributors ("The Mojo 400") and "The Best Congress Money Can Buy," a searchable database of campaign contributions ([http://www.mojones.com/coinop\\_congress/coinop\\_congress.html](http://www.mojones.com/coinop_congress/coinop_congress.html)).

For general help on campaign finance reporting and on-line

sources, try the Web site of National Institute of Computer-Assisted Reporting (<http://www.nicar.org/data/fec>).

### Legislative Issues

For updates on federal legislation and for the Congressional Record, the Library of Congress has a Web site called Thomas (<http://thomas.loc.gov/>).

Congressional staff members have compiled information on members of Congress, including helpful links on committees and legislation, at CapWeb (<http://policy.net/capweb/congress.html>).

### Polls

Try the Gallup organization's Web site (<http://www.gallup.com>) for recent polling information. To identify voters' voices and issue-related organizations, try Democracy Place (<http://www.soundprint.org/democracy>), an interactive site sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Pew Center for Civic Journalism.

### Humor

Campaign humor abounds. A popular place to find some is at the site offered by the Capitol Steps comedy organization (<http://pfm.het.brown.edu/people/mende/steps>).

Stephen Franklin

Franklin, a veteran of telephone-assisted journalism, is a reporter for the Chicago Tribune. This article, and sources from "The Virtual Trail," (CJR, January/February) are posted on CJR's Web site (<http://www.cjr.org>).

# The Society of Professional Journalists announces the \$30,000 Eugene C. Pulliam Fellowship editorial writing award for 1996

### The history

The Society of Professional Journalists began the Pulliam Fellowship in 1977 through a grant from Mrs. Eugene C. Pulliam. The fellowship honors the memory of Eugene C. Pulliam, one of the original members of the Society, founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi. Pulliam was also the publisher of The Indianapolis Star, The Indianapolis News, The Arizona Republic and The Phoenix Gazette.

### The fellowship today

The fellowship, a grant of \$30,000, is awarded annually to an outstanding editorial writer to help broaden his or her journalistic horizons and knowledge of the world through travel or study. The award can be used to cover the costs of study in any field and/or the costs of travel in the United States or abroad.

### The requirements

Qualified applicants will have at least three years full-time editorial writing experience, outstanding writing and analytical abilities and a specific plan for study and/or travel. Applicants must send a

one page personal biography, a summary of professional experience, five samples of your editorials, your plan for study and/or travel with a discussion of how this award will enhance your professional development and a letter of endorsement from your employer. All entries must be in English.

### The presentation

The fellowship recipient will be notified by September 1 and will receive the award at the Pulliam Editorial Fellowship Banquet on November 23 in Charleston, South Carolina.

### The deadline

Materials should be postmarked by July 1, 1996, and be sent to:

**Pulliam Editorial Fellowship**  
**Society of Professional Journalists**  
**16 South Jackson Street**  
**Greencastle, Indiana 46135-1514**

If you have questions please contact the Society at (317) 653-3333.  
The Pulliam Editorial Fellowship is an SDX Foundation educational program for the Society of Professional Journalists.



## Campaign '96 mtv news comes of age

In 1992, when producer/reporter Alison Stewart of MTV News arrived in New Hampshire to cover the presidential primary, she found most of the candidates hesitant to be interviewed by the music-video network. "They all thought we were going to ask them about the last five records they bought," she recalls.

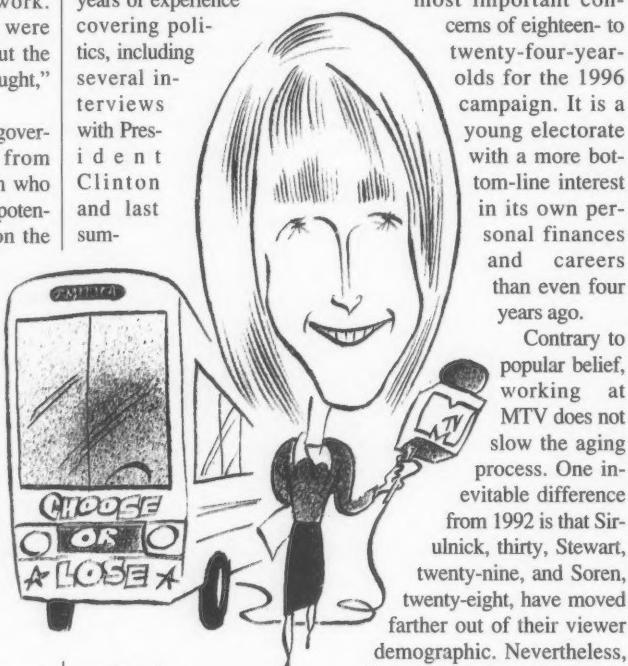
It was a little-known governor and saxophonist from Arkansas named Clinton who best understood MTV's potential, and he appeared on the cable network throughout the '92 campaign, later crediting it with helping energize young people about politics. George Bush, by contrast, initially declined to go on what he called "the teenybopper network" before finally agreeing to an interview with MTV correspondent Tabitha Soren in the campaign's last days.

Now, four years later, the candidates are much more eager. "They now know that the questions will be serious," Stewart says, "and they all realize how important our audience is." And this time around the candidates will be dealing with a more experienced operation.

MTV News's executive producer, Dave Sirulnick, says that in 1992 most work was done on the fly. "We started very small, doing one event at a time, seeing what the vibe was." This year, the coverage, which again is being wrapped under the "Choose or Lose" banner, has more resources and planning behind it. An election team that once consisted of just

Stewart and Soren now has fifteen full-time staff people who worked on logistics for more than nine months.

In addition, the seventy-five-member MTV News department has had four more years of experience covering politics, including several interviews with President Clinton and last sum-



mer's televised roundtable with House Speaker Newt Gingrich and a group of young people, titled "Newt Raw."

The "Choose or Lose" reports vary in length from thirty seconds to four minutes, and are integrated into daily news updates, which focus predominantly on music and other cultural news.

Throughout 1996, the network is also presenting periodic specials focusing on issues of concern to young people and holding the type of televised public forums with leading candidates that began with candidate Clinton in the summer of '92. Meanwhile, "Rock the Vote" public ser-

vice announcements featuring music personalities like Aerosmith, Madonna, and R.E.M. are stressing the importance of voting. And MTV is publishing a forty-five-page "Voter's Guide," which is being distributed free.

Voter surveys conducted by MTV indicate that the economy, education, crime, race relations, and AIDS are the most important concerns of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds for the 1996 campaign. It is a young electorate with a more bottom-line interest in its own personal finances and careers than even four years ago.

Contrary to popular belief, working at MTV does not slow the aging process. One inevitable difference from 1992 is that Sirulnick, thirty, Stewart, twenty-nine, and Soren, twenty-eight, have moved farther out of their viewer demographic.

Nevertheless, Stewart says they all keep in touch with the interests and concerns of their audience, noting, half in jest, that when in doubt, she'll consult with one of the many college-age interns on the news staff.

*John Solomon Solomon is a New York-based free-lance writer.*

### to russia with savvy

The war in Chechnya may turn out to be the undoing of Boris Yeltsin, but it has been the proving ground of Russia's new independent television

news organizations. Independent stations have been sprouting up in the former Soviet Union since 1990 and have provided an alternative to the government-controlled coverage since the war broke out in 1994 by sending their own correspondents and carrying foreign broadcasts. They have also broken a number of important stories that would formerly have been quashed — for instance, that the bombing of Grozny, the Chechen capital, was continuing after President Yeltsin announced that it had stopped.

The success of the independent stations in Russia is due, at least in part, to Internews, a private American nonprofit organization that has been boosting non-governmental media in Russia and the other former Soviet republics since 1992. The independent coverage in Chechnya, says Paul Greenberg, an Internews director of training, "is a real example of where Internews has had an effect."

Powered by grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development and the financier/philanthropist George Soros, Internews has provided professional, technical, and financial assistance to more than 300 independent stations in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, as well as former republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia. More than 2,000 journalists, producers, and station managers have attended Internews workshops on subjects ranging from the "basics of good journalism" to programming, management techniques, and attracting advertisers.

Though Internews has been spared the ax so far in this time of government cutbacks, it is unlikely to keep its current level of financing for more than a couple of years, says Greenberg. Nevertheless, it has begun to expand its services to

the Balkans and Palestine and is considering moving on to Africa and Haiti.

The California-based organization was founded in the early 1980s by David Hoffman, a union organizer experienced in fundraising, and the documentary filmmakers and news producers Kim Spencer and Evelyn Messinger. From 1987 to 1990, Internews cooperated with ABC News to create the Emmy Award-winning series "Capital to Capital," which linked U.S. and Soviet national lawmakers by satellite to discuss superpower relations.

Since its first attempts to aid the emerging independent media in Russia, the primary goal of Internews has been to promote "ethical conduct" and professionalism, said Vincent Malmgren, who is the organization's director of operations. Its offices in Moscow and Kiev, Ukraine, provide training and production facilities for journalists and, in coopera-

tion with member stations, produce nationally broadcast news programs.

Internews has also helped in the formation of the Independent Broadcasting System, an affiliation of 115 stations across the former Soviet Union that is believed to have the potential to reach 112 million viewers. Along with sharing programming, the network has already hooked such big-money advertisers as Coca-Cola, Johnson & Johnson, Revlon, Cadbury Schweppes, and Procter & Gamble. According to Internews' associate director for broadcast media, Sheldon Markoff, TV advertising in all of Russia in 1995 could be as high as \$800 million, up from \$550 million in 1994.

One of the major new initiatives at Internews is the media development program, whose tasks have included developing standardized audience research in Russia — critical to attract-

ing advertisers. A recent Internews-sponsored polling of twenty-two cities indicated that independent stations are indeed keeping up with state stations.

Outside the news realm, much of the programming on independent television has improved little from its early days of broadcasting pirated MTV and B-grade American movies. Programs like *The Love Boat* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which are cheap, easy to get, and tend to attract Western advertisers, often clog independent airwaves. "Ultimately," Malmgren says, "I would like to see these stations producing their own programs." In the meantime, he says, he's not worried about the junk-food programming. "They survived seventy years of Communism," he says. "They'll survive McDonald's."

Perhaps the greatest challenge currently facing the Russian news media is how to cover the presidential election

— especially the campaign of the popular Communist leader Gennadi A. Zyuganov, which segments of the Russian media appear to have largely ignored. Internews has held workshops on campaign coverage during past parliamentary elections, but is avoiding such activities for the presidential campaign. Persephone Miel, who works for Internews in Moscow, said the organization had been urged by both USAID and the U.S. embassy in Moscow not to become involved. The independent stations themselves, of course, are free to cover the campaign as they see fit. Having pledged to remain objective, they are faced with trying to report disinterestedly on a figure whose election, many fear, could prove disastrous to freedom of the press.

*Corin Cummings*  
Cummings, an intern at CJR,  
worked at an independent television  
station in Siberia in 1994.



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# Darts & Laurels

◆ **DART** to ABC's *Good Morning America*, for excessive filial devotion. The March 3 program presented an uninterrupted eight-minute celebration of The Disney Institute in Orlando, the newest vacation spot developed by "our parent company" for those who "have graduated from other Disney resorts" and seek to enhance their "quality of life" with an "adventure in education." With the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance" filling the air, *GMA* consumer editor Amy Atkins sampled some of the institute's eighty "edutainment" courses in canoeing, cooking, self-defense, topiary, animation, and the like that are available at "an average \$600-a-weekend" rate; plugged the "high-caliber" entertainment offered to guests; elicited "It's wonderful!" testimonials from happy senior-citizen campers; worked in the Disney name or its Mickey Mouse image some sixteen times; and easily confirmed the public's worst fears of the high potential in synergy for journalistic sin.

◆ **DART** to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, for injudicious journalism. When appellate judge Ralph Adam Fine, one of seven candidates running in the February primary for Wisconsin Supreme Court, challenged in a private letter to the opinion-page editor the ethical propriety of the paper's intention to make an editorial endorsement in the race in light of its frequent involvement in libel and privacy cases that come before that court, publisher Robert A. Kahlor (a defendant in a pending libel case) responded in a letter to Fine testifying to "our journalists' ability to 'set aside personal pursuits and interests,' provide 'professional, objective judgment,' and render 'disinterested decisions' when 'they review judicial candidates and draft endorsement editorials.'" Three days later, the *Journal* bestowed its favor on one Lawrence Bugge, a partner in the law firm of Foley and Lardner whose "breadth and depth of qualifications" no other candidate "can match." One unmatched qualification the editorial failed to note: the paper is represented by Bugge's firm.

◆ **DART** to NBC *Nightly News*, for slipping into a stereotypical state. In a January 27 update on the condition of the conjoined twins born in Mexico and surgically separated in the United States, correspondent David Gregory informed viewers all around the country

that the parents of the twins had "snuck across the U.S. border" from Tijuana in order to get medical help. Gregory's assumption of illegal immigration, however, was contradicted by the facts. As coverage by the *San Diego Union-Tribune* and others made abundantly clear, the family had obtained the full cooperation and support of San Diego's Children's Hospital, which had not only donated its medical services to the twins but had also sent the ambulance that picked them up and transported them across the Mexico-California border, a trip that was interrupted only by a half-hour delay to process the bureaucratic paperwork.

◆ **LAUREL** to the *San Jose Mercury News* and staff writer Mark Leibovich, for "Designated Hitters," a muscular piece on the problem of violence against women by athletes. Centering on a number of Bay Area sports figures but ranging farther afield as well, the cover story in the paper's December 3 Sunday magazine documented in striking detail a pattern of brutal assaults by these so-called heroes on their girlfriends, groupies, and wives; it documented, too, a parallel pattern in which such assaults are ignored or excused by starstruck cops and courts and press. In one typical example, a judge asked for an accused batterer's autograph. In another, a police lieutenant, referring to an incident involving a Giants outfielder who had reportedly beaten up his wife, told Leibovich, "I know when I play softball, when I lose, I'm certainly not in the best of spirits." Team officials, too, the writer points out, are more likely to penalize players for physical violations on the field than for those at home. And from the fans, he notes, abusers still get standing ovations. "When," his report concludes, "does the cheering stop?"

◆ **DART** to *The Philadelphia Daily News* and entertainment columnist Stu Bykofsky, for a misguided use of space. Bykofsky turned his December 11 column — all twenty-two precious column-inches of it — into a sandwich board for his recently published "guy's" guide to Philadelphia, including a list of thirty-one sample topics covered (restaurants, hotels, best bar to meet a nurse) as well as details on how to get this "great stocking stuffer" in time for "Xmas" giving. Carried under the headline BUY MY BOOK! AM I BEING TOO SUBTLE?, the hard-sell commercial also included this

aside: "If you feel I'm slightly overdoing it by devoting a whole column to hyping [the book], Congratulations! You could be a managing editor here."

◆ **DART** to *The Boston Globe* and reporter Matt Bai, for overzealous application of the public's right to know. Bai's account of the fiftieth person slain in 1995 on the city's streets — a young high-school dropout fatally shot after an argument at a party at his girlfriend's home — made mention of the victim's name some seventeen times, along with mention of the fact that because the victim's mother was attending her grandmother's out-of-state funeral, she had not yet been told of her only child's death. In contrast, the same day's account in the rival *Boston Herald* included all the facts the public needed to know *except* the victim's name, a fact withheld because, reporter Sean Flynn's story explained, "The family was afraid [his mother would] learn the tragic news from the papers or radio, rather than from those who love her."

◆ **DART** to WXIA-TV, Atlanta, and reporter Carmen Burns, for carrying the torch. At a press conference called by the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games to mark the "100 Day Countdown" to the opening of events and unveil its plans for the banners, logos, pictograms, and other decorations designed to create "The Look," Burns turned up not in the audience with other members of the news media but at the ACOG podium with officials of the committee. There she described for the astonished journalists the "ACOG blue" blazers, the "Olympic teal" scarves, the "Olympic white" sox, and the other "stylish," "functional," and "easily maintained" clothing and accessories that employees and volunteers would be sporting at the scene. (According to a report in the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, Burns's boss, news director Dave Roberts, found nothing disqualifying in her ACOG performance. WXIA, the report went on to note, is the "official" local TV station for the games, giving it the right to use Olympic symbols in promotions of its own.)

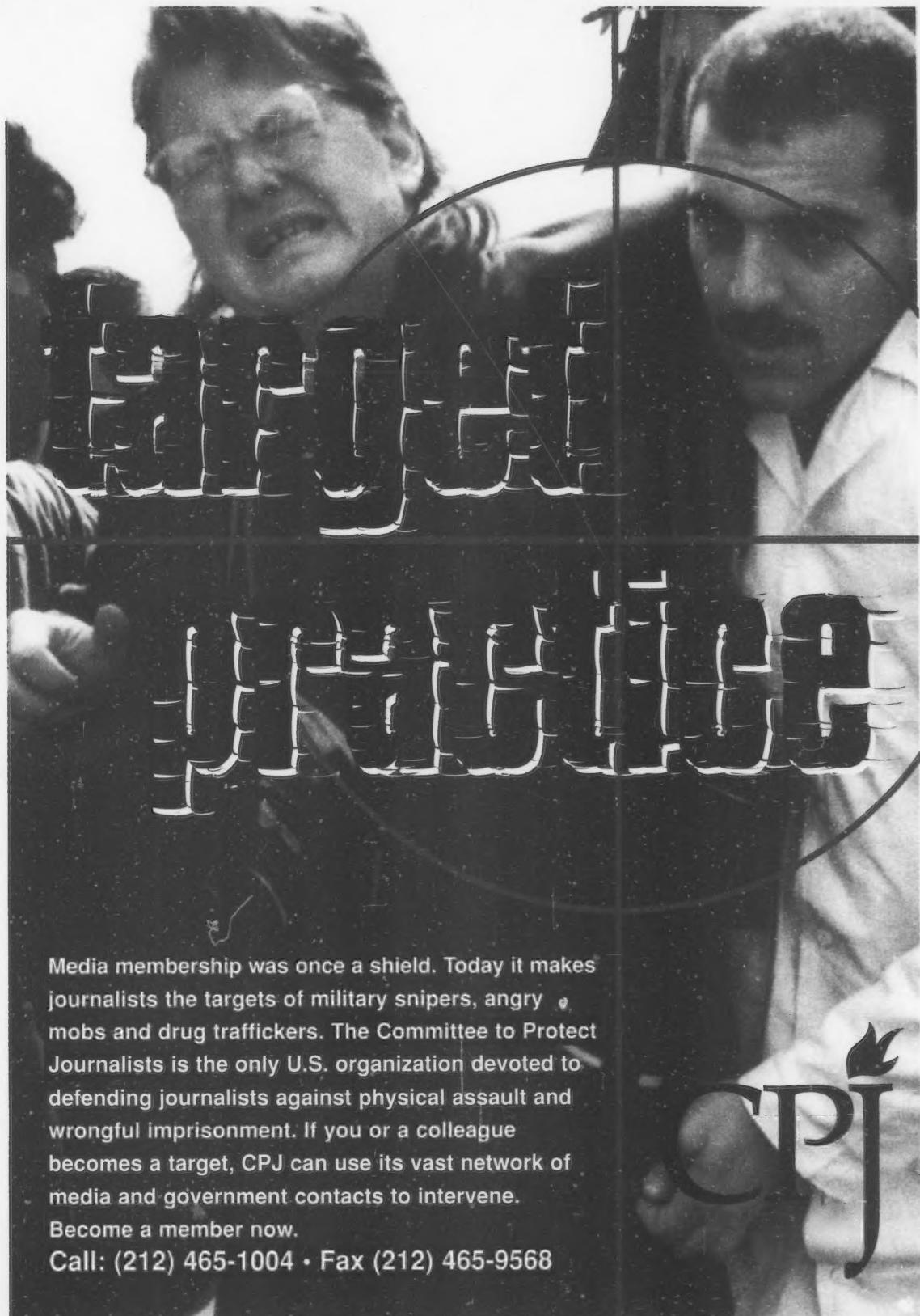
◆ **LAUREL** to Rupert Murdoch, for a decisive vote for civic journalism in its least problematic form. As press lords grow more lordly in our free-market democracy while at the same time devising gimmicks that claim to rescue that democracy from impending collapse, the Australian-born, now naturalized chairman of the billion-dollar News Corporation has made a gracious bow to the public interest. Deploring the obsessive and corrupting need by politicians to raise colossal sums of money for television spots as "a cancer in our system," Murdoch announced in a February 26 speech to the National Press Club that, in the weeks leading up to the national election on November 5, his Fox Television stations will make airtime available — including an hour of prime time on election eve — to

the major presidential candidates, free of editorial interference and free of charge. Murdoch also challenged others to follow his lead. "It would be a very good thing for television, for our country, and for the voters who also happen to be our customers," he said, "if all of network TV did so." Meanwhile, as Walter Cronkite and Paul Taylor observed in an op-ed piece in *The Washington Post*, "The initial reaction from the three more established and public-spirited networks was [as Murdoch himself had predicted] to treat him as 'the skunk at the tea party.'"

◆ **LAUREL** to *Fortune* magazine and staff writer Richard Behar, for sorting out the garbage in New York's trash-collection industry. In his January 15 report on the courageous efforts by legitimate outside contractors — notably William Ruckelshaus's Browning-Ferris Industries — to gain a foothold in the billion-dollar Mafia-controlled market, Behar detailed the history of beatings and bribes, extortion and threats — including a gift of the severed head of a dog — that has kept the mob in charge, as well as the growing pile of prosecutions and indictments (achieved with Browning-Ferris's help) that, together with dramatically lower costs to businesses all around the city, are beginning to take effect. Graphic sidebars identified mob-linked carters under investigation or indictment, along with their best-known clients; also listed were major organizations that have been brave enough to buck the Mafia bosses and move to BFI — among them, United Parcel, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nabisco Foods, Hotel Intercontinental, and *The Village Voice*. (At *The New York Times*, apparently, such moxie is in short supply. Behar points out that, although a 1993 *Times* editorial praised BFI for coming into a market it described as a "well-documented disgrace" run by "gougers and racketeers," the *Times* continues to have its own rubbish hauled away by a company indicted for alleged participation in a Mafia-run cartel.)

◆ **DART** to Judith Sweeney, president of the Orange County edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, for an attitude problem of the most fundamental kind. In a "Christ in the Marketplace" talk delivered at Westmont College in Montecito and later reprinted in the school's quarterly alumni magazine, Sweeney revealed to the (presumably) worshipful audience at her alma mater some of the crosses she has had to bear in her earthly job at the *Times*. One "obstacle to being an effective witness [for Christ] in the secular work world," Sweeney told the students, "is submitting to the authority of a non-Christian boss. How do you submit to the authority of someone on a daily basis that doesn't have the moral character that you do?"

*This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.*



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## Columbia University Joins Biosphere 2:

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IS NOW MANAGING Biosphere 2, the world's largest controlled ecological laboratory, which is located between Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona. Some of you may wonder why an Ivy League university has chosen to extend its campus 2400 miles west. I would like to explain our reasons and tell you about our plans. But first, a little history.

### How We Got Started

In 1992, scientists from Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory were called in to help figure out why the oxygen levels in Biosphere 2 had dropped by 50%. Our scientists found the answer: microbes in Biosphere 2's excessively rich soil were ravenously consuming oxygen as they decomposed organic matter.

While working on the problem, our researchers became intrigued with Biosphere 2 itself. They told Columbia's scientific community about the facility's potential to help address some of our planet's most compelling environmental questions:

- ❖ How will the rise of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere impact the ecology of our planet?
- ❖ Will the rise in carbon dioxide allow us to grow more food with less water?
- ❖ Will the increase in plant growth created by extra carbon dioxide significantly offset the negative aspects of global warming?

### Research for a More Habitable Planet

Convinced that Biosphere 2 could help provide answers to these and related questions, Columbia, through its Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, assumed a leadership role. Last year, as part of the Biosphere 2 team, we brought together scientists from Columbia and other world-class universities and research facilities to create a research agenda for Biosphere 2.

Based on this agenda, several research projects are now in place. One examines how food crops will benefit from an atmosphere containing increased carbon dioxide. Another explores how potential climate and ocean acidity changes will impact coral reefs. A third investigates how increased carbon dioxide will alter the competition among various plant species.

### Teaching and Learning are Important Too

Research is not our only goal. We're introducing innovative educational programs as well. Among them:

- ❖ A college-level program in Earth and environmental sciences. Students will live and study on the Biosphere 2 campus, using Biosphere 2 as a

learning tool. They will also travel to the Grand Canyon and elsewhere to study Arizona's rich geological history. And they will seek clues to how past climate changes may have influenced past civilizations. The first session will begin this May.

- ❖ A "semester abroad" program. Students from around the world will study here with teams of geologists, biologists and anthropologists. They will conduct research using data collected in Biosphere 2's laboratories. Our first class will arrive in September.
- ❖ An innovative Earth Sciences curriculum. Students, teachers and researchers across the nation will be linked through the World Wide Web to learn about the latest environmental and Earth Science research. Parts of this program are already up and running.
- ❖ Teacher workshops. Teachers will learn creative new methods for teaching about the forces that drive our planet and Earth's evolving environment. Sessions will be held throughout the year.

### The Public is Always Welcome at Biosphere 2

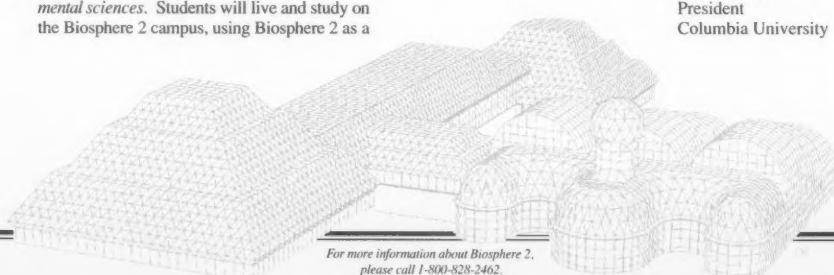
We are greatly expanding the Science and Visitors Center Program, too. Using computers, visitors to Biosphere 2 will soon be able to tap into data collected by the many sensors in the facility's five ecological systems — its rain forest, ocean, savannah, desert and swamp. Later this year, we will open a "cyber cafe" for visitors wishing to surf the Internet to learn more about the Earth.

We also plan to offer week-long courses for the general public that will provide a bird's eye view of the way science is done. And, for the first time, visitors will be able to enter a special area of the Biosphere 2 research facility to observe science in progress. We hope that all those who come to Biosphere 2 will acquire a better understanding of Biosphere 1 — planet Earth.

Be sure to visit Biosphere 2 the next time you are in Arizona. We look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,

George Rupp  
President  
Columbia University



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# Should the coverage fit the crime?

*A Texas TV station tries to resist the allure of mayhem*

---

by Joe Holley

**I**t's 10 o'clock and news viewers across the country know where they'll be for the next few minutes: at the scene of the crime.

Crime and violence — what the Denver-based Rocky Mountain Media Watch calls "mayhem" — are as ubiquitous on local news shows as the winsome male-female anchor team and the happy chat between bite-sized bits of coverage. Critics argue that this mayhem not only crowds out more legitimate news but skews reality, that local TV newscasts must share responsibility for the fact that, at a time when crime rates across the country are going down, public anxiety about crime continues to rise.

What if a TV news operation refused to cover crime in the same old way? Would crime still make the same noise in the community? Would the station?

Since the beginning of the year, Austin's ABC affiliate, KVUE-TV, a Gannett station, has been trying to find out. KVUE's experiment not only has given Austin viewers something of a choice, but it has forced the station's staff to reassess long-held assumptions about how to cover crime, or even whether to cover it. It has forced reporters, editors, and news directors to ask that more basic question: What is news?

Partly because violent crime is relatively rare in the city, Austin TV has never been terribly crime-obsessed. But after a complicated network-affiliation swap last year, the local CBS station, re-named K-EYE, hit the market with a bagful of gimmicks, razzle-dazzle graphics, and hyperbole, focusing attention on the way crime gets covered. K-EYE's yen for mayhem may be only slightly more knee-jerk than its competitors', but its approach underscored the public's impression that local TV news thrives on violence and disaster.

*Joe Holley is a writer who lives in Austin.*

Although K-EYE's ratings remain in single digits nearly a year after the affiliation shuffle, the station has stayed with its format.

It was KVUE, meanwhile, the longtime ratings pacesetter, that decided to try to break its Pavlovian response to the squawking police scanner and the melodramatic visuals.

Now, before a crime story makes it on the air on KVUE, it must meet one or more of five criteria:

- 1) Does action need to be taken?
- 2) Is there an immediate threat to safety?
- 3) Is there a threat to children?
- 4) Does the crime have significant community impact?
- 5) Does the story lend itself to a crime-prevention effort?

No sooner were these guidelines installed on January 21 than they were tested by a trio of murder stories. In early February, in the small town of Elgin, thirty miles east of Austin and in the KVUE viewing area, three men shot and killed each other during a Saturday-night brawl. The triple murder failed to make the KVUE newscast.

The station's three competitors aired the story. "When somebody's killed, that's news," says Jeff Godlis, K-EYE's news director. But to Mike George, KVUE's news manager, the incident was unfortunate, but it wasn't news. George points out that a KVUE reporter drove to Elgin twice to investigate. She found that the men, all Mexican nationals, were not permanent Elgin residents, and that the dispute that prompted the shootings was an isolated incident fueled by drugs and alcohol.

"There was no immediate threat to public safety, no threat to children, and there was really no action that you would take, other than to say 'I don't want to go to that part of Elgin,'" says Cathy McFeaters, KVUE's executive producer. "It really wasn't a crime-prevention story, so then the question becomes significant community impact, and the reaction that we got by just asking people about it was that they weren't too concerned." Staff members worried that some might think the reason this story did not air had to do with the nationality of the killers and victims. "We talked about whether it would make a difference if these guys were from Lubbock or New York or wherever," McFeaters says. "It didn't."

The second story, during the third week of the experiment, involved a man who stabbed his wife in the front yard of their home and then barricaded himself inside the house. Some of KVUE's competitors reported live from the scene.



Cathy McFeaters, executive producer



Carole Kneeland, news director

## **"Being number one revolved around the lowest common denominator, and I got disgusted with it" — Cathy McFeaters**

ty guideline, and because the shooting happened in a busy Wal-Mart parking lot, the story easily met KVUE's guidelines.

"Austin police need your help today," KVUE anchor Walt Maciborski began. "They are looking for suspects in a murder at a Wal-Mart store. The shooting happened in the parking lot of the store in Northeast Austin last night. . . . Police arrested a sixteen-year-old at his home this morning and charged him with murder. They are looking at store surveillance tape to find other suspects." A seventeen-year-old was later arrested and charged.

**M**cFeaters, KVUE's thirty-one-year-old executive producer, is the catalyst for the crime-coverage experiment. An associate producer at KVUE during and after her college years at the University of Texas at Austin, she then went to the Gannett station in Jacksonville, Florida, and took a job in 1991 as a producer at ABC's WSOC in Charlotte, North Carolina. That ABC affiliate bears the dubious distinction of being the ninth-worst station for excessive "mayhem" out of a hundred that the Rocky Mountain Media Watch group examined last fall. (The top three stations on the "mayhem index" are WLKY-TV, Louisville, Kentucky; KNBC-TV, Los Angeles; and KFOR-TV, Oklahoma City.)

"That was the first time I had worked for a metered market, where you live or die by the daily ratings," McFeaters recalls. "You lead with crime. I always understood the thing about ratings, because I'm a very competitive person, and I love to be first. But being number one revolved around the lowest common denominator, and I got disgusted with it. But how could I argue, because we were doing really well?"

The solution, McFeaters thought, was to leave the business. She reached the nadir, she says, with a story about bestiality;

KVUE's reporter on the scene found that the man inside the house was eighty-two years old, could barely walk, and was nearly blind. He had no criminal record and seemed to present no threat to neighbors or to the police. Again, the incident didn't meet the guidelines, and KVUE did not air the story.

The third story took place in a Wal-Mart parking lot, where a twenty-one-year-old man, after an argument inside the store with two teenagers, was shot and killed when he walked outside. Because the perpetrators were at large at the time of the newscast, thus meeting the threat-to-public-safe-

she'd rather not recall the details. But in plotting her escape from WSOC, she discovered by accident that KVUE had an opening. Her boss there would be Carole Kneeland, a respected broadcast veteran who happened to share McFeaters's concerns about crime coverage.

Kneeland, who is forty-seven, was the capital bureau chief for nearly eleven years for Dallas's WFAA-TV before becoming KVUE's news director in 1989. Like McFeaters, she has long been concerned about what she calls local TV's over-coverage of crime and disaster. For her, a story that KVUE ran last fall seemed to crystallize the issue. A pickup truck swerved off the highway and into the playground of a day care center, killing a child. It was a poignant story, but it happened in California. The story ran in Austin and elsewhere for one reason: the heartbreaking video of the little body lying on the playground.

Not long after that, Kneeland and McFeaters began putting together their crime-coverage concept. The station had been convening monthly community meetings for the previous year, and from those meetings



**Mike George, news manager**

they already knew that the coverage of crime and violence was a persistent viewer complaint.

"We wouldn't even have to ask about it specifically," Kneeland says. "We'd say, 'What do you think about local news coverage?' The first thing they'd always react with was, 'It's too violent. It's too sensational.' Or, 'There's too much crime coverage with no significance.'"

"I remember talking to Carole, and I said, just jokingly, 'I just wonder what would happen if no one covered crime?'" McFeaters recalls. "It wasn't like a mission of mine or anything; it was almost out of spite for Charlotte."

It was also a marketing strategy, she admits. "That is not why we are doing it, but that's certainly a part of it. I felt sure that people would appreciate this and would watch us because of it."

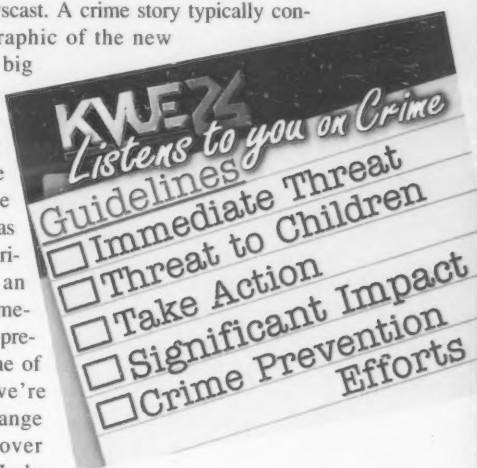
The two women encouraged the news staff to begin analyzing how — and why — the station was covering crime stories. "The reasons [reporters] gave about why something ought to be covered — 'Somebody ought to do something about that!' or 'It affects the community' — gradually became the categories," Kneeland recalls. Informal criteria evolved over a period of three or four months.

The station's general manager, Ardyth Diercks at the time, signed off on the experiment in early December; Kneeland and McFeaters laid the final guidelines out for the staff on January 10. With a promotion barrage and explanatory spots during the newscasts, the station put the plan into practice a week and a half later.

A number of viewers complain that they got tired

of hearing about the new approach. Indeed, until March, the explanation and promotion of the new guidelines were woven right into the newscast. A crime story typically concluded with a graphic of the new guidelines, with big red check marks

on which guidelines the story was deemed to have met. There were oral explanations as well. "Today's marijuana bust is an example of a crime-fighting or crime-prevention effort, one of the guidelines we're using now to change the way we cover crime," anchor Judy Maggio told her view-



## **"We confirmed that there were three dead on the scene, and the thought process began right then: Is this going to meet the guidelines?" — reporter Greg Groogan**



**Judy Maggio and Bob Karstens, co-anchors**

ers in February. "The project is KVUE Listens To You On Crime. We're still going to cover crime, but we're doing it in a less violent and sensational way. We would like to hear your feedback." She went on to say that she and "Bob" — co-anchor Bob Karstens — would host a discussion about the station's new crime-coverage philosophy on America Online that evening.

The response to the experiment itself has been overwhelmingly positive. "A big congratulations to KVUE for the efforts to keep unimportant violence off television . . ." reads a typical fax. "We are not interested in gory details about who got smeared on the interstate, who got murdered, etc." reads another.

Austin Police Chief Elizabeth Watson, an outspoken advocate of community policing in this rapidly growing city of more than half a million people, also endorses KVUE's new approach, while she is critical of K-EYE's razzle-dazzle. "I think that it is commendable for a major TV news station to really take a look at responsible reporting, commendable from a community service standpoint," she says. "Sensationalized reporting fuels fear. It makes people feel powerless."

**B**ut when does "responsible reporting," to use Chief Watson's term, become a kind of cheerleading for local law enforcement or a device for self-censorship? In the first few weeks of the experiment, the station seemed to be blurring the distinction between straight reporting and being "a responsible member of the community." Its incessant efforts to tease out crime-prevention tips in every story often sounded more like police public-service announcements than news stories.

"We've got these neat little guidelines," reporter Kim Barnes says, "which means we've got to give a solution, so let's give some tips. My concern is that so much of our focus



**Wendy Erikson, reporter and weekend anchor**

## **"The world is violent. Your ignorance of it doesn't make it less violent" — a KVUE viewer**

and concern is on getting the sidebar [the crime-prevention tips] that we're not getting the who, what, when, and where — which is our primary job."

Some viewers consider the KVUE experiment an effort to avoid reality. "Grow up," one viewer urged in another fax. "The world is violent. Your ignorance of it doesn't make it less violent. It only makes it more palatable to you when you stick your heads in the sand."

A similar objection came from Joe Phelps, pastor of an American Baptist church in an Austin suburb. "Frankly," the minister wrote in an op-ed piece that ran in the *Austin American-Statesman*, "hearing about violence is the least we can do to remain connected with our fellow citizens, our kin, who experience such tragedy. The reporting should not be sensationalized. Pictures may not always be appropriate. But the reality that people kill and are killed on a regular basis is newsworthy. We need to hear it."

Competitor K-EYE, meanwhile, is trying to make a little ratings hay with that no-crime perception of KVUE. "Is your newscast giving you all the news?" K-EYE's latest promo asks, a not-so-subtle dig at KVUE's highly publicized crime diet.

For Kneeland, McFeaters, and others at KVUE, the perception that the station no longer covers crime has been frustrating. When critics call, Mike George takes pains to explain the distinction the station makes between covering a crime story and airing it. His reporters listen to the police scanner just as they always have, he explains, and they still investigate crime and violence. But after they've asked the questions and nosed around the crime scene, they now have to decide whether the

story is worth putting on the air. And if it's worth putting on the air, is it worth "packaging," giving it the full story-and-pictures approach? "This policy makes us think about the way we cover crime," George says. "It's just like any other story: we ask the question 'Why is this important?'"

"What we're trying to get away from is an automatic response to the way we cover crime," McFeaters says. "We're not trying to deny the ugliness in the world; that's not what this is about. However, we have a responsibility not to give that ugliness more play than it deserves."

McFeaters draws a sharp distinction between what KVUE is doing and the "family-sensitive" approach, pioneered by WCCO-TV in Minneapolis, one of a handful of stations around the country that are spurning violent, manipulative, and emotion-laden newscasts. The Minneapolis station pledges that its 5 P.M. newscast will never contain material that a family with children watching would find offensive. To McFeaters, such a pledge is a gimmick, in effect a kind of self-censorship. The Minneapolis station, she says, allowed the perception to develop that it had, in effect, "gone soft" on crime. She doesn't want that to happen to KVUE, and the station's promotional efforts are aimed at heading off that notion.

It is a Monday night toward the end of February, and McFeaters and Kneeland have called

a meeting of the newsroom staff to assess their experiment. Minutes after anchors Bob Karstens and Judy Maggio wrap up the 6 P.M. newscast with a bit of happy chat with weatherman Mark Murray, the staff gathers around a white oval table in the corner of the large, airy newsroom. Behind them, floor-to-ceiling inverted-V windows in a stark white wall offer views of suburban Austin at dusk.

Maggio and Karstens sit side-by-side at one end of the table, just as they do on the set. Reporters, editors, producers, directors, news managers, engineers, and photographers, a couple of dozen in all, slouch in chairs and on desks or lean against the wall around the table. Several of their colleagues scurry about the newsroom getting ready for the 10 P.M. newscast. It's a youthful-looking group; the average age is probably under thirty.

Three video cameras record the gathering as McFeaters opens the meeting with a videotape of another gathering — a viewer focus group that had met several times over a two-month period. The seven members of this group — young and old; black, white, and brown; male and female — are thoughtful and articulate and uniformly supportive of the station's crime-coverage experiment. "I have to be perfectly honest," says Ora Houston, a grandmotherly African-American woman. "I have not missed the crime or the mayhem or the stabbings. It's like my life is much more settled, it's calmer. We know crime's going on. In our neighborhood, we're trying to be proactive about it, but we don't need to see it every day."

The tape ends. Standing in the shadows away from the table, McFeaters says, "Let's start with some of your frustrations."

A reporter replies: "Sometimes it's difficult when there's something you're not covering, and you know the other sta-



KVUE-TV reporters Robbie Owens, Kim Barnes, and Greg Groogan

tions are covering it, and you wonder whether you're doing your job." Another says she worries about digging for the deeper angle and slighting the "who, what, when, where, why. Are we fulfilling our core responsibility?" Someone else, expanding on the thought, suggests a billboard-type graphic that would display such information, without pictures.

## "Sensationalized reporting fuels fear. It makes people feel powerless" — Police Chief Elizabeth Watson

Somebody else comments that "People are saying, 'Oh, y'all are the station that doesn't cover crime anymore.'"

"One of the frustrations is that we've made the decision that this particular life is more important than another one," reporter and weekend anchor Wendy Erikson says. "A family is out there saying, 'My family deserved at least a fifteen-second notice.'"

"Of course, we make those decisions all the time," McFeaters replies, "when we don't report the death of someone with AIDS or cancer or a baby that's died of SIDS." She adds that the only strong complaint she's heard about the experiment is about the promotion. "They're saying, 'All right, already! Quit telling us what you're going to do and just do it!'"

The group discusses ratings and how long the experiment might last if ratings slip. "Hypothetically, what if it costs us number one?" asks reporter Greg Groogan, surveying the faces of his colleagues. "Do we stand on principle, or do we backtrack?" Groogan urges taking a stand.

"I think we do have a more intelligent group of people here in Austin than in other cities," Carole Kneeland says, "so if it can work anywhere, I think it will work here."

Everyone around the table on Monday night was keenly aware that the experiment had undergone its most severe test just a day earlier, February 25. Groogan, who usually covers politics and investigative projects, had been doing weekend duty as part of a skeleton staff. He had arrived at work on Sunday thinking that he had made it through more than a month of the experiment without having to make a critical news judgment. A few minutes later he and photographer Chris Davis were rushing to the scene of a shooting at an apartment complex for married

students at the University of Texas. "We confirmed that there were three dead on the scene," he recalls, "and the thought process began right then. Is this going to meet the guidelines? If this was murder, was the murderer still at large? Was there an issue of public safety?"

It seemed that a graduate student in engineering had shot his wife and four-year-old daughter and then turned the gun on himself. "We had a hook," Groogan says. "It was the first murder on UT properties since the Charles Whitman shootings from the UT tower in 1966. That wasn't a bad hook, but that wasn't going to cut it under our new guidelines."

Meanwhile, University of Texas police had found a weapon and told Groogan they had a 911 tape of the woman calling for help. Campus police were slow to provide much more, and the 5:30 newscast was looming. "We still weren't there," Groogan recalls, "at least for the early show."

If not for the guidelines, Groogan would already have been back at the station with a story in the can. Viewers might not have seen body bags, as they did on K-EYE that evening, but they might have heard the 911 tape and gotten the details about three violent deaths. Now, however, Groogan couldn't find a justification for airing the story: there was no immediate threat to the community, the crime itself was solved, and there was really nothing to say about prevention. There seemed to be no significant community impact; the family was new to the apartment complex, and the neighbors barely knew them. The guideline about children? In this case, the child was dead.

Back at the station, Sunday anchor Wendy Erikson had another killing on her hands, and another decision about the guidelines — an apparent drive-by shooting on Austin's predominantly black and Hispanic east side that had taken place late Saturday night. The suspect was in custody, there was no threat to children, no threat to the community.

"We were between a rock and a hard place," Groogan says.

"With our limited weekend staff, we could follow both stories and still not get them on the air. We called Carole at home."

Erikson, thirty, is from suburban Chicago, where, she says, "I grew up watching death and destruction" on TV.

She would have aired both Sunday stories without a second thought — before the experiment. Now she found herself in something of an ironic situation. Kneeland wanted to run the

drive-by shooting story, but Erikson didn't believe it met the criteria Kneeland herself had developed. "Our credibility is on the line," Erikson told her boss.

"Carole told us to start digging on both, looking for larger issues," Groogan recalls. "She said, 'We cannot drop these stories. If we don't go on the air, that's the price we pay, but we cannot use these guidelines as an excuse not to cover them. Our job is to gather facts and then decide whether to air. The guidelines are not an excuse for not doing the nuts-and-bolts job of reporting.'"

Groogan and other reporters dug. Although neither story made the 5:30 newscast (except for a brief mention of the

## **"I'm in transition. I'm uncomfortable with the guidelines right now, but part of me does feel good thinking I may somehow be contributing to a change in our society" — Wendy Erikson**

East Austin murder), Erikson fully aired them both at 10.

The story of the apparent murder/suicide at the university apartment complex focused on the immediate community's response to the tragedy. The residents of the apartment complex gathered at sunset on a playground and talked over what had happened, among themselves and with Groogan. Groogan also listened as counselors talked to the residents about signs of domestic abuse, which was an issue in the investigation, and what they could do to help prevent it.

Groogan believes that the guidelines forced him to stay with the story, and that this extra effort paid off in context and perspective. "In this place," Groogan reported at 10 that night, "where small children are constantly at play, there is a new fear — a fear of guns. They're supposed to be illegal on all university property. Residents wonder if other neighbors have ignored the ban." The visuals were subdued — the apartment complex, children playing there, and, from a distance, the residents in discussion.

KVUE also determined that the other shooting, in East Austin, had significant community impact as well, and in ways KVUE might have missed had it covered the incident simply as a drive-by shooting. Groogan and reporter Robbie Owens — who was pulled off another story to explore the community's response — discovered a predominantly black neighborhood eager to let the rest of Austin know that this was not just another stereotypical incident. "Although this is a terrible time for Bobby Reed's family and friends, they want Austin to know that this was not a gang shooting or a crack deal gone bad," Robbie Owens explained on the air. "It was a family gathered — laughing, talking, and eating enchiladas. Then, witnesses say a white man pulled up, exchanged some words — including a racial slur aimed at the black family gathering. They say he then fired a shotgun, hitting two people, one of them Bobby Reed, who died. But tonight some family and friends say their concern right now is not about hatred, but about loss."

"We had a family pleading for peace, and the community

impacted was more than just that block where he lived," Cathy McFeaters says. "It was all of East Austin, all of black Austin."

"I believe that Sunday night newscast was a litmus test," Groogan says. "To Wendy's credit and to our producers' credit, they didn't want to be hypocrites. To Carole's credit, she sensed that by digging a little deeper and looking a little wider, we could still cover those stories without breaking our commitment."

Wendy Erikson still feels a little unsettled by that Sunday experience, however. On the earlier newscasts, "all other stations aired both stories," she recalls, "and I was literally anchoring and feeling that we weren't covering

crime. We had four people dead on a quiet Sunday, and we weren't covering it. I've been taught to present the facts, and now I'm in this position where I'm having to decide

whether this particular story is something I feel viewers should see.

"I'm in transition," she adds. "I'm uncomfortable with the guidelines right now, but part of me does feel very good thinking I may somehow be contributing to a change in our society."

**I**s changing society a journalistic concern? Can new journalistic guidelines also be promotional vehicles? And can thoughtful coverage of important local issues, crime included, compete with gripping images of maimed victims and distraught relatives? "Crime is punctuation," anchor Bob Karstens says. "It grips people. It's hard-edged. The challenge for us is to find stories with the same hard edge that aren't crime stories." McFeaters, who takes pride in the flashy Florida TV tricks she picked up in Jacksonville, believes KVUE can offer good journalism and good TV.

She acknowledges that ratings will ultimately determine the fate of KVUE's experiment, but she hopes the station doesn't rush to judgment. "They usually give news directors and anchors two or three years, football coaches two or three seasons before they off 'em," she says. "I don't think you draw any conclusions by one book." If ratings slip, McFeaters says she'll blame the presentation, not the concept, and she'll press to keep trying.

"We characterize it as an experiment, because it is," she says, but adds, "It's not an experiment in the sense that there's an end to this; it's not a one-shot deal. There's no way that at the end of the month Carole or I can walk out into the newsroom and announce, 'OK, now we can start covering crime the way we were.' This newsroom is forever changed. Everyone is going to look at how they cover crime differently from now on."

The February ratings came out in mid-March. They were KVUE's best ever. The station increased its already-solid ratings lead for every newscast, reaching its highest numbers in a decade for its 10 P.M. show. The crime-coverage experiment continues. ♦



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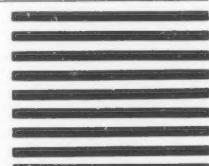
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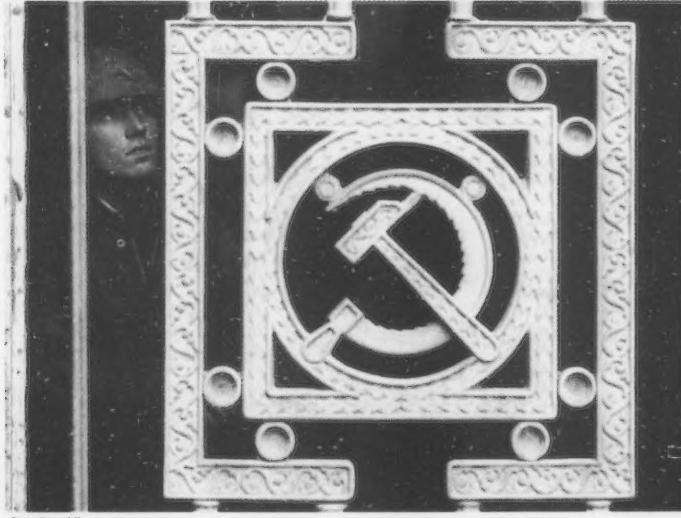
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### JOURNALISM

#### **PUBLIC SERVICE**

- Awarded to **THE NEWS AND OBSERVER**, Raleigh, NC, for the work of Melanie Sill, Pat Stith and Joby Warrick on the environmental and health risks of waste disposal systems used in North Carolina's growing hog industry.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* the Star-Tribune (Minneapolis-St. Paul) and The Baltimore Sun for the work of Ginger Thompson and Gary Cohn.

#### **SPOT NEWS REPORTING**

- Awarded to **Robert D. McFadden** of **THE NEW YORK TIMES** for his highly skilled writing and reporting on deadline during the year.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* The Eagle-Tribune (Lawrence, MA) and the Los Angeles Times staff.

#### **INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING**

- Awarded to **The Staff of THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER**, Santa Ana, CA, for reporting that uncovered fraudulent and unethical fertility practices at a leading university hospital and prompted key regulatory reforms.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Chris Adams of The Times-Picayune (New Orleans, LA), and David Jackson and William Gaines of the Chicago Tribune.

#### **EXPLANATORY JOURNALISM**

- Awarded to **Laurie Garrett** of **NEWSDAY**, Long Island, NY, for her courageous reporting from Zaire on the Ebola virus outbreak there.
- *Nominated as finalists:* Chris Lester and Jeffrey Spivak of The Kansas City Star; Michael A Hiltzik, David R. Olmos, and Barbara Marsh of The Los Angeles Times, and Adam Bryant, Stephen Engelberg, and Matthew Wald of The New York Times.

#### **BEAT REPORTING**

- Awarded to **Bob Keeler** of **NEWSDAY**, Long Island, NY, for his detailed portrait of a progressive local Catholic parish and its parishioners.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Alison Grant of The Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH) and Fred Schulte and Jenni Bergal of The Sun Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL).

#### **NATIONAL REPORTING**

- Awarded to **Alix M. Freedman** of **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL** for her coverage of the tobacco industry, including a report that exposed how ammonia additives heighten nicotine potency.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Russell Carollo, Carol Hernandez, and Jeff Nesmith of the Dayton (Ohio) Daily News and David Maraniss and Michael Weiskopf of The Washington Post.

#### **INTERNATIONAL REPORTING**

- Awarded to **David Rohde** of **THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR** for his persistent on-site reporting of the massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Laurie Garrett of Newsday, Long Island, NY, and The Wall Street Journal staff.

#### **FEATURE WRITING**

- Awarded to **Rick Bragg** of **THE NEW YORK TIMES** for his elegantly written stories about contemporary America.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Richard E. Meyer of the Los Angeles Times and Hank Stuever of The Albuquerque Tribune.

#### **COMMENTARY**

- Awarded to **E.R. Shipp** of **THE DAILY NEWS**, New York, NY, for her penetrating columns on race, welfare, and other social issues.

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- Awarded to **Robert Campbell** of THE BOSTON GLOBE for his knowledgeable writing about architecture.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Gail Caldwell of The Boston Globe and Stephen Hunter of The Baltimore Sun.

### **EDITORIAL WRITING**

- Awarded to **Robert B. Semple, Jr.** of THE NEW YORK TIMES for his editorials on environmental issues.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Daniel P. Henninger of The Wall Street Journal and N. Don Wycliff of the Chicago Tribune.

### **EDITORIAL CARTOONING**

- Awarded to **Jim Morin** of THE MIAMI HERALD
- *Nominated as finalists:* Jim Borgman of The Cincinnati Enquirer, Ted Rall of Chronicle Features (San Francisco, CA), and Tom Toles of The Buffalo News.

### **SPOT NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY**

- Awarded to **Charles Porter IV**, a freelancer, for his haunting photographs, taken after the Oklahoma City bombing and distributed by the Associated Press, showing a one-year-old victim handed to and then cradled by a local fireman.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* The Associated Press staff and Jerome Delay of the Associated Press.

### **FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY**

- Awarded to **Stephanie Welsh**, a freelancer, for her shocking sequence of photos, published by Newhouse News Service, of a female circumcision rite in Kenya.
- *Also nominated as finalists:* Stan Grossfeld of The Boston Globe and David C. Turnley of the Detroit Free Press.

### **SPECIAL AWARD**

- Awarded to **Herb Caen**, local columnist of the SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, for his extraordinary and continuing contribution as a voice and conscience of his city.

### **LETTERS**

### **FICTION**

- "INDEPENDENCE DAY"** by RICHARD FORD  
(Alfred A. Knopf)

### **DRAMA**

- "RENT"** by the late JONATHAN LARSON

### **HISTORY**

- "WILLIAM COOPER'S TOWN: POWER AND PERSUASION ON THE FRONTIER OF THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC"** by ALAN TAYLOR  
(Alfred A. Knopf)

### **BIOGRAPHY**

- "GOD: A BIOGRAPHY"** by JACK MILES  
(Alfred A. Knopf)

### **POETRY**

- "THE DREAM OF THE UNIFIED FIELD"** by JORIE GRAHAM (The Ecco Press)

### **GENERAL NON-FICTION**

- "THE HAUNTED LAND: FACING EUROPE'S GHOSTS AFTER COMMUNISM"** by TINA ROSENBERG  
(Random House)

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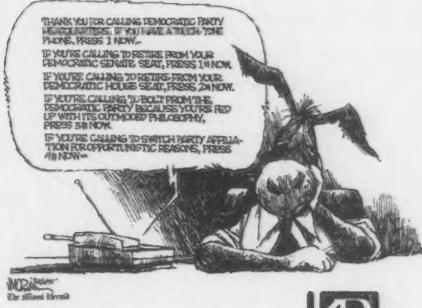
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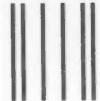
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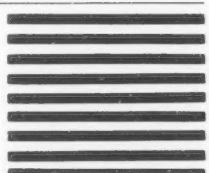
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## ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

# LOST in *Never-Never-Land*

by Christopher Hanson

We're sometimes called "the boys," even though some of us are in our sixties and many now are women. We believe, ignoring all evidence to the contrary, that we're in a competitive game, not a bottom-line enterprise. We form gangs, point fingers, call names, and engage in the sort of unruly behavior that prompted one manager in Denver to tell his staff (in a memo leaked to *The Washington Monthly*): "I'd like the rubber-band wars to stop. And the throwing of pencils, paper wads, and fruit." In a word, we're journalists — living confirmation of a statement in the old Mary Martin production of *Peter Pan* that wide-eyed children and seasoned adults are not so very different after all: "We remain the same throughout, merely passing in these years from one room to another, but always in the same house."

*Christopher Hanson is Washington correspondent for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and a contributing editor of CJR. The Media Research Center provided tapes.*

The statement is especially true of reporters covering national politics. Every four years we enter a chamber where, as in the playroom theatrics of childhood, we create our own reality, change it at whim, alter it to suit our fancy. It's the alcove of the early presidential primaries, in which no candidate has yet secured a delegate majority and where we are thus at liberty to project, speculate, and stargaze, with nothing at stake but our credibility.

In this campaign season's early phase the game was even more diverting than usual. We didn't just kill candidacies off. We resurrected them and killed them again, as in playground wars of old. Each week, at times every couple of days, our sand castle consensus was kicked down and eagerly rebuilt. But then, on or about March 12, far sooner than we had hoped, the dreaded specter was upon us: game over, drama dead, Bob Dole — BOB DULL, as *The Washington Post* called him in one headline — sews up nomination. Time to go home and eat all our broccoli.

Much of the campaign coverage up to that point was a rebellion against the idea that broccoli time was near — even though history was in Dole's corner: since the modern primary system took shape, the Republican party's

pre-season front-runner has *never* been denied the nomination, and Dole was the undisputed front-runner. His national organization, heavyweight endorsements, and ample funds gave him a huge advantage in the "front-loaded" schedule. Weekly, multi-state contests started March 5 with nearly all delegates selected by April 1. With this schedule, tailor-made for an establishment choice like Dole, it would have been extraordinarily difficult for outsider candidates like Pat Buchanan, Lamar Alexander, and Steve Forbes to be nominated. Their strategies entailed getting boosts from strong showings in Iowa and/or New Hampshire, but "front loading" in past years had made those states increasingly irrelevant; even if an upstart candidate did well in one of them — like Gary Hart in 1984, Dole in 1988, Paul Tsongas in 1992 — the later contests came too fast and furious to allow him to capitalize. Hart, Dole, and Tsongas lost in the end.

Usually, the Democrats can be relied on to provide journalistic fun and games. But this year — for the first time since 1964 — there was no Democratic contest. If we were to report a horse race, it would have to be on the Republican side. And we *had* to report a horse race, even if it meant turning a blind eye to Dole's advantages. Journalists penned up in Washington for four years by tight travel budgets had been given the go-ahead to hit the trail, and were not about to be denied; veteran Boys of Winter were ready to hold court and swap stories again in Des Moines and Manchester; newcomers were lining up impatiently for a seat on the campaign bus.

And this year there were deeper factors at work, more important than mere professional needs. After a decade of criticism for being out of touch with the public, campaign reporters and ordinary citizens were now finally in sync: something was stirring in the national psyche because something was missing in our political life; dissatisfaction and anxiety were running high; it was hard to put one's finger on the ache — it stemmed in part from the doubts and confusion and lack of direction following the cold war's end — but Dole, so widely seen as yesterday's man, was no cure; polls showed solid majorities of voters yearning for an alternative.

For all these reasons, we were intent — like Peter Pan's band of urchins, who begged Wendy to spin them bedtime yarns — on having a dramatic story, with conflict and suspense and a challenger with a fighting chance to whip Dole. If he didn't exist we would have to invent him. And last year's Colin Powell boomlet was a striking first effort at such news-as-wish-fulfillment. It was an attempt via cover story, live interview, and lead editorial to conjure up the ultimate political adventure, the perfect challenger for a public disgusted with politics, a leader who was truly above the fray: say he's great, build him up, lure him in, will it to happen, and make it happen. But, given the public loathing for politics, Powell

paradoxically could only fulfill the expectation of ultimate leader by not leading. He could never run and never serve and thus was the ultimate Never Land candidate.

That left the news media with a less heroic choice in the multimillionaire flat-tax advocate Steve Forbes.

He partly inflated his own balloon — in this case, with a TV ad campaign that got him

aloft in the polls and prompted the

press to pump in more hot air.

By January, Forbes was smiling buoyantly

from magazine covers and front pages and leading

Dole in polls. But almost immediately, he ran afoul of the media's

conflicting needs. As Powell understood,

they require not only heroes but also antagonists — every story needs its Captain Hook — and so will seek to reveal a candidate's darker side. True to form, reporters leapt upon evidence that Forbes was an ordinary politician in the guise of an anti-politician (his negative ads being a case in point) and that his tax plan would have benefited the wealthy, including the Forbes family, rather than the middle class. Under this assault, Forbes plummeted. By the eve of Iowa, he seemed almost as much a make-believe candidate as Powell: he had peaked and fallen to earth before a single vote had been cast.

Still badly needing a major challenger to Dole — who still had history and organization on his side — the press moved on to Iowa. There was only one thing to do. Ignore history, take each caucus and primary as a new game, and make the nomination contest as close and dramatic as Peter Pan's description of his island playground: "Nicely crammed, with hardly any space between one adventure and another."

Here's how the adventure unfolded, as told by some of the Lost Boys and Girls of the campaign trail:

**February 12, Iowa.** Dole wins, Buchanan comes in second, ex-Tennessee Governor Alexander third, Forbes fourth, but much is made of the narrowness of Dole's victory and his alleged febleness. On the *Today* show, for instance, Bryant Gumbel — playing a post-race commentary game with a panel of three NBC journalists — asks for five-word headlines on the previous night's results.

Tim Russert: "Race up for grabs."

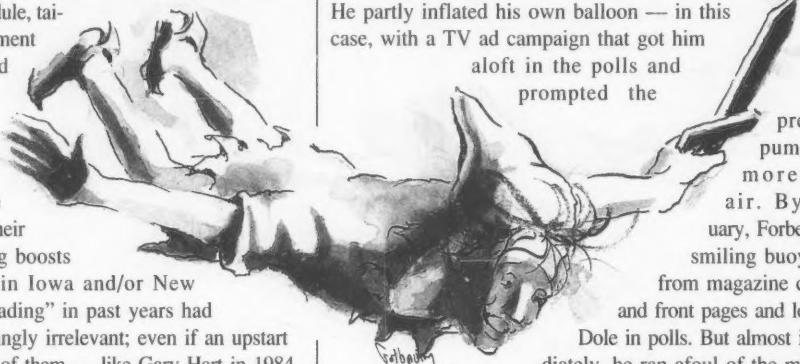
Gwen Ifill: "Very good! 'Buchanan on a roll.'"

Lisa Myers: "Disappointing night for Bob Dole, who was . . ."

Gumbel: Hey. Whoa! That's more than five words (*laughter*).

Russert: Let me help her. Second headline: "Alexander, man to watch."

There you have it: Dole won but really lost, Buchanan and Alexander lost but really won, his challengers are potent indeed. This is the consensus of the press corps, and the games have begun: every misstep by the front-runner must be



treated as a potentially fatal fall, every little twitch must be covered like an earthquake.

**February 20, New Hampshire.** Indeed, Buchanan's one-point victory here over Dole is cast as The Big One. Its implications are hyped and then the hype is hyped, with Dole's underlying advantages all but forgotten. Even the usually serious Ted Koppel radiates childlike glee, chortling on *Nightline* that "we in the media got what we wanted in New Hampshire. . . . After tonight, nothing is preordained! Everything is possible!" Now the sweeping generalizations and dubious speculations come fast and furious, all prompted by a few thousand votes in one tiny state.

• **DOLE IN A TAILSPIN.** When Dole won Iowa by 3 percent, he was weak, and second-place finisher Buchanan was strong. But now that Buchanan has won New Hampshire by 1 percent, the commentator is strong, second-place finisher Dole in dire straits. On *Nightline*, Koppel argues: "It now seems entirely possible that Senator Dole will . . . snatch defeat from the jaws of victory." On *Today*, Gumbel speaks of "a fading Bob Dole." On *The Boston Globe* op-ed page, staff writer David Nyhan declares: "Someone should alert the bugler. It may soon be 'Taps' for Senator One Last Mission."

• **BUCHANAN IN THE STRATOSPHERE.**

Although his limitations are the same as before — it's unclear that this hard-line populist can win much more than 30 percent of the vote in any state — Tom Brokaw announces that New Hampshire "created a new front-runner."

Without declaring the race over, Doyle McManus of the *Los Angeles Times* predicts (on *Inside Washington*) that "Buchanan is going to go into the convention with more delegates than anyone else," and NBC's Ifill says "he gave a sucker punch to the Republican party tonight. They are floored and now they can't stop him. . . ." Buchanan's liftoff is fueled partly by the media's need for a strong challenger, partly by the affection many journalists feel for Buchanan as a sometime media man — a hail fellow who understands their need for fresh angles, "filing time," etc. — despite ideological differences.

(At the same time, a frenzy of news reports — prompted by a study by the Center for Public Integrity, a liberal watchdog group — play up Buchanan's selection of one Larry Pratt, leader of Gun Owners of America, as campaign co-chair. Pratt attended a meeting in Colorado in 1992 to discuss FBI conduct in the controversial Ruby Ridge standoff and members of the

white supremacist Aryan Nation also attended. News organizations including ABC and NPR make much of the supposed extremist link, even though Pratt denounces Aryan Nation at a press conference. Detecting a whiff of McCarthyism in some of the coverage, *Boston Globe* columnist Tom Oliphant writes: "There is not one shred of evidence that Pratt has ever uttered one bigoted or anti-Semitic word in his life. But because he has attended meetings . . . with people who have, Pratt has been tarred with their views and this taint is now applied to Buchanan. What this amounts to . . . is guilt by the associations of one's associate."

• **ALEXANDER AIRBORNE.** Because he does better than expected, Alexander comes off as a winner by finishing third, even though he lacks money and organization and any persuasive scenario for winning a primary. New Hampshire "catapulted

Lamar Alexander into the front rank of contenders," according to a *Boston Globe* report. "It may be that Mr. Alexander . . .

gained the most from today's voting," writes R.W. Apple in *The New York Times*. Alexander goes on to lose every primary.

• **NEW CANDIDATES ON THE RUNWAY?** Most filing deadlines for primaries have passed, making it all but impossible for a new candidate to enter. But hope obscures the facts at CBS, where Dan Rather asks: "What are the chances a Colin Powell or even a

Jack Kemp reconsiders and finds a way to get in this?" Over on CNN, Bernard Shaw poses a similar question to Powell booster Ken Duberstein, who dismisses the idea of a Powell candidacy and adds that writing Dole off "is vastly premature." This is solid, common-sense advice. Needless to say, it is not heeded.

• **FORBES CRASHES,**

**BURNS.** A fourth-place finish in New Hampshire is widely reported to have ended the effective candidacy of Forbes. As ABC's Cokie Roberts cracks on *Nightline*, "He was dead after Iowa, and he's still dead" — prompting Peter Jennings, marveling at her acumen, to declare: "She's made us dispensable, Ted."

**February 27, Arizona.** Dispensable until tonight, that is. Forbes wins the Arizona primary with 33 percent of the vote and is . . . REBORN! NBC's Jack Ford reports that "Arizona's



capital, Phoenix, is named for a mythical bird recreated out of its own ashes. [Given] what's happened to the Steve Forbes presidential campaign, it may well be the perfect symbol." Rather and Brokaw deem Forbes the new front-runner and a *Wall Street Journal* editorial declares: "The Forbes victory . . . makes him a serious contender for the nomination."

And what of Dole? Although he wins North and South Dakota this very night, the media say he's in very deep doo-doo. Koppel declares "it is still far too early to be drafting a funeral oration . . . but the candidate is not looking well, politically speaking." CNN's William Schneider says: "It may be fatal."

The doo-doo around Dole is piled so high by TV journalists on primary night partly because of a Voter News Service exit poll. It prompts CNN's Judy Woodruff, breaking in on *Larry King Live*, to report that "Bob Dole will come in third in Arizona — this is a major setback to the Dole presidential campaign," inspiring King to respond: "As always, right on top of the scene, Judy Woodruff." In fact, the poll is wrong (evidently skewed by a Forbes absentee ballot drive weeks earlier) and Dole finishes a more respectable second. Only NBC is skeptical enough to avoid consigning him to third. Speaking of the poll snafu the next day, CNN political director Tom Hannon tells *The Dallas Morning News*: "It's going to redouble our sense of caution, no doubt about it. Once in a while we misfire."

In fact, on a twenty-four-hour-a-day news cycle, with competitive pressures giving us an itchy trigger-finger, misfiring is not that unusual. Consider how news organizations, citing the Arizona results, began hawking a half-baked revolving-winner theory — the notion that no candidate can win consistently or secure a delegate majority, and that a "brokered convention" is glimmering at the end of the trail. Reporting on brokered conventions is the ultimate in journalistic wish-fulfillment. They never happen in practice (there has not been one in forty-four years) so one has to squeeze as much drama as one can out of the idea when it still seems possible in theory, drawing expansive conclusions from scraps of "evidence." Thus a *New York Times* news analysis suggests that, after Arizona, "every victory by a candidate in one state will be canceled out by another candidate's win somewhere else." A *Washington Post* editorial declares: "Anybody can enter, anybody can win. That now seems the rule." Both papers say a contested convention is plausible. So does *Time* magazine in a major takeout with a "how Dole might lose" leitmotif, positing scenarios for his defeat in nine states from South Carolina to California (e.g., "Dole hasn't clinched the nomination by March 26 and California voters decide he's overdue for retirement"). In fact, Dole goes on to landslide wins in every one of those states.

What all this hokum on "brokered" conventions points up is a weakness of even veteran journalists in mastering basic ideas. Even if no candidate had a delegate majority going into a GOP convention (highly unlikely given that most primaries are winner-take-all, which creates and favors front-runners) the convention could not be "brokered" in some back room. For one thing, there would be leaks, and the media would not let back-room

negotiations stay secret for long. For another, party bosses have far less clout than they once did and party activists who become delegates are not robots. What journalists were really hoping for was not a "brokered convention," resolved in secrecy, but a free-for-all, with chaos on the floor.

**March 2, South Carolina.** This is the last small state contest before the weekly, multistate calendar kicks in and Dole can fully capitalize on his national political machine. Despite signs that Dole has South Carolina cornered — strong leads in the polls, support from a solid chunk of Christian conservatives, backing from the GOP governor and other state bigwigs — some news organizations cling, in the days before the vote, to the notion that the Kansan is sinking here and in dire jeopardy elsewhere. *The Boston Globe* reports that Dole is "politically shell-shocked, financially drained, and facing a . . . contest in South Carolina that could be tailor-made for Patrick J. Buchanan." On *Nightline*, Koppel asks Hal Bruno, the network's political director, if Buchanan can be propelled, via South Carolina, to the nomination, Bruno shoots back: "And how he can!"

In the event, Dole crushes Buchanan and Alexander in South Carolina and polls show him with a commanding lead in all eight Junior Tuesday states that are to vote three days later. Even so, *Time* continues to cling to the idea that Dole could falter and party leaders could give the prize to someone else.

**March 5. Junior Tuesday.** Dole wins Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, Colorado, and Rhode Island. Alexander is swamped and Forbes is flailing. Despite their initial yearning for an alternative, GOP voters are falling into line behind the establishment man as they come to view him as the main alternative to Buchanan. ABC's Jeff Greenfield quotes Republicans who attribute Dole's victory to factors the press itself had acknowledged before Iowa — money, organization, endorsements, broad (if not deep) appeal, and a schedule tailored to an establishment candidate.

"According to this view, Dole wrapped up the nomination last year when his more formidable rivals chose not to run. Iowa and New Hampshire were media frenzies, but essentially bumps in the road," Greenfield reports on *Nightline*. Ted ("Nothing is preordained! Everything is possible!") Koppel can only say, in words that apply as much to print types, including me, as to TV stars: "Perhaps there is a special little corner of hell reserved for journalists where [we] will be forced to watch and listen to an endless loop of our own inaccurate analyses and projections. . . ."

But this isn't the last word. Later on the show, Jennings, Koppel, and others are back arguing that Forbes remains a formidable challenger. According to Bruno, Forbes poses a threat to Dole and is "kind of like a wealthy guerrilla band, where he's got the latest in modern weapons."

In reality, there is no road map indicating any realistic route to a Forbes nomination. To find the way, one has to look elsewhere, as with Peter Pan's magic island:

"It's not on any chart,  
You must find it in your heart —  
Never-Never-Land."



ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

## IT'S ALL IN THE EYES

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY P. F. BENTLEY

**W**hen making a photograph of a person the focus point is usually the eyes. And when you make 400 pictures in a day that's a lot of "eye time." That's "eye time" that the pollsters or reporters in the back of the room don't get. As a political photojournalist, I have covered every presidential hopeful since 1980 for *Time* and have never been wrong about which candidates would be on the ballot in November. It's all in the eyes.

*Bentley's book from the 1992 campaign, Clinton: A Portrait of Victory, was followed last fall by Newt: Inside the Revolution. He has also covered political campaigns in Haiti, Panama, El Salvador, and Cuba.*





I cover challengers, not incumbents. In the 1992 primary presidential campaign I picked an obscure governor from a small southern state to follow for the year. My editors at *Time* and some fellow journalists insisted that I had picked the wrong guy. They said this virtual unknown named Bill Clinton had big problems and would not last the primary season. I knew better.

The same thing happened this year when I picked a mature senator from a midwestern state to follow. As I left my home in California on New Year's Day, heading for Washington to

cover Bob Dole, my editors at *Time* asked, "Are you sure about this?" "No problem" was my reply.

When I am trying to choose a candidate at the beginning of the campaign season, I try to imagine him in the "Ten Weeks of Hell," as I call it, that time from Labor Day until Election Day. Campaigning sixteen hours a day, no days off, airplane, car, event, car, airplane, car, event, car, airplane, car, event, car, airplane, car . . . hotel — and then the day starts all over again. During the primaries of 1992 Clinton had the strength to never give up. I could see the look of determination

that the others just didn't have. I can see it too in Dole. Dole has had the strength to get beyond his war injuries. The campaign for him is easy.

Through Iowa and New Hampshire, Buchanan, Forbes, Alexander — these were the press corps' "flavors of the week." Sucked in by the public's short attention span, the press fawned over each new arrival, each new poll taken by serious news organizations showing Dole fading, fading, fading. But Bob Dole and Bill Clinton have something lasting that can only be seen by looking into their eyes all day while focusing a camera. ♦



# Is There Life After Layoff? FIVE STORIES

by Mary Ellen Schoonmaker

In an elegy for *The News Tribune*, a New Jersey newspaper that ceased to exist last year, one of its reporters, David Levitt, wrote, "When you get to heaven, be sure to check out the newsstand." The elegy, which appeared in *The New York Times*, told how in heaven everyone reads the papers that have died on earth: not only Levitt's *News Tribune*, but also a distinguished mix of old and new. *The Philadelphia Bulletin*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, *New York Newsday*, *The Houston Post*, and *The Baltimore Evening Sun*. Late, it's been getting pretty crowded up there.

But a heavenly end for a newspaper can mean hell on earth for those left behind. So can downsizing, outsourcing, and staff reductions. What has demoralized America's other jobholders has demoralized journalists, too. The print newsroom workforce has lost nearly 2,000 jobs, or 3.4 percent, over the last five years, despite a 2.2 percent rise in 1995, according to figures from the American Society of Newspaper Editors. There is hardly a newsroom anywhere in this country where reporters and editors haven't secretly wondered, "Can it happen here?" The answer is, "You'd better believe it."

And then what happens? I spoke to reporters and editors who have been through it all: the shock, the pain, and the panic, as well as the mustering of the courage to get on with life.

Some of those who have found new jobs, either inside or outside journalism, say they often feel incredibly guilty for having landed on their feet while others are still struggling. Some of those who haven't describe their feelings as something like post-traumatic stress syndrome. I spoke to a former jazz critic who now does public relations for the local opera. "There is

more to being laid off than just losing a job," he says. "I had to confront surviving on my own, and who I am, if I am not the big entertainment writer anymore. I had to rethink my sense of identity. There's also a sense of loneliness. At a newspaper, you are surrounded by a lot of creative, energetic, and intelligent people, and as a free-lancer, you spend a lot of time alone. I like being around people."

But this man said the thought of sending out a barrage of résumés is daunting, too. "How do you follow up? How do you make yourself stand out? When you call an editor, what do you talk about?"

**"A lot of people who are laid off spend months bad-mouthing the paper. That's self-defeating."**

For many, a new job means leaving family, friends, and a beloved city behind. "I am missing Houston terribly," says a reporter who found a job in California after *The Houston Post* folded. "And I can't go back and visit because with this new job, I am not getting vacation any time soon."

Given the market these days, the chance of finding a job at another newspaper is slim. One editor was interviewed thirty-four times at the newspaper he was applying to before he got the job; another was interviewed twenty-seven times at the same paper, and didn't get the job. For a lucky few, the abrupt end to one career means the opening of another.

Most of the journalists I talked to said they have no regrets, that they tried new things and took chances they might never have taken if they had stayed where they were. Others said it was a nightmare. All of them said they will never feel secure in a job again.

Mary Ellen Schoonmaker is a columnist and member of the editorial board of *The Record* in Bergen County, New Jersey.



Judi Dash

AREL SKELLY//FAMILY CIRCLE

### Judi Dash

I had worked at *The Record* in Hackensack, New Jersey, for thirteen years, and I had been travel editor for seven years. Layoffs were expected, but I didn't expect to be laid off. It happened in September of 1991.

*The Record* gave me a month with an outplacement service, and that was a wonderful thing to have done. People who are laid off are so depressed, they just want to sleep in and drink coffee, but you need to not sink. The outplacement service was a godsend. I had to get dressed in business attire every day. They gave me an office with a telephone to call anywhere in the country, and a secretarial staff to type up résumés.

I really did not want to go, but I went the very next day. I figured I would have plenty of time to be depressed while I was waiting for responses to my calls and résumés to come in.

### "I had to take a pretty significant pay cut myself, but at least I am still in journalism."

A lot of people who are laid off spend months bad-mouthing the paper. That's self-defeating. No matter how bitter you are, don't burn your bridges. The journalism world is very small. We are not very realistic or world-wise. We think of ourselves as people who are outside business. But the reality is we are part of a business. And it has a bottom line and needs. The only value we have is what we can provide for the employer on a day-to-day basis.

When I was laid off, I lost my sense of entitlement. If I was going to stay in a career that I loved, I had to think about what I could offer.

The key for me was the networks I had formed. I had been a member of the Editors Council of the Society of American Travel Writers. We used to send each other our travel sections. So after I was laid off, I called all my colleagues in my profession and told them what had happened. And it really paid off. It jump-started me. At least once a day an editor would contact me and say I was welcome to free-lance. It wasn't lots and lots of money, but it bolstered my self-confidence.

I wanted to stay in travel, so I talked to all these editors and asked what they were looking for. I had to temper what I loved with what was marketable. And out of that have come two nationally

syndicated columns, "The Active Traveler" and "Travel Gear and Gadgets." I also write for national magazines.

Free-lancing is the wave of the future, because so many papers use independent contractors now. I sell articles and photographs. I really work hard, but I make a lot more money.

### Lisa Bass

I had worked the night before August 19, 1995, at *The Houston Post*, where I was a copy editor. The next morning I got a phone call from a friend who worked for *The Houston Chronicle*. "How do you feel?" she asked. "Well, tired," I answered. "Aren't you just devastated?" she said. I had no idea what she was talking about. Then she told me the *Post* had shut down. Rumors had been going around for years, but we learned to ignore them.

My husband, Frank Bass, who was the *Post*'s medical writer, was on assignment in the middle of a war zone in Guatemala, with a group of doctors who were donating their time to poor people. He was in a very remote village in the highlands. I spent the next two hours with my limited Spanish trying to track him down. The paper cut off his corporate American Express card, but luckily they had already paid for his plane ticket home.

When the paper folded, we had kids, aged eight, three, and one, and a mortgage. The paper gave us forty-three days of severance pay. Our life insurance ended the day the *Post* closed, and our medical insurance ended at the end of that month.

Since we were both out of work, we decided early on that it would be counterproductive for Frank to be interviewing in Albuquerque and me in St. Louis. I felt as a copy editor that I was more portable. So the way we handled our search was for him to take a very active role and I would follow along.

It took Frank about four months to get a job, and he is a top-notch writer who has won lots of



JOHN ROMAND

Lisa Bass

awards, including the Pulitzer Prize. He interviewed with about a half-dozen papers, and all expressed interest, but then they either had hiring freezes, or tight budgets, or bureaucratic hoops to jump through.

He was finally hired by the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and we packed up and moved there, although we didn't sell our house.

The worst time of this whole experience for us was leaving Houston. I immediately hated Fort Worth. The *Star-Telegram* did not seem likely to have a job for a

## "Use the same journalistic skills that you use on stories when you are looking for a job."

copy editor. I was developing an addiction to the soaps and gaining weight.

So for lack of anything better to do, I taught myself to design World Wide Web home pages, and I designed one for everyone who had been laid off by the *Post* — the Toasted Posties. I was trying to keep the *Post* community together, and I needed to tell the world what had happened. I was taking potshots at William Dean Singleton, the *Post's* former owner.

It started to attract attention, and one day a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal's* Texas Journal, a weekly insert, called and did a little story about it. We talked a long time, and I told her our situation. Two weeks later, she called back and said there was an opening for a reporter at *The Wall Street Journal* in Houston, if my husband was interested. We faxed his résumé right away, and he got the job. It was a direct result of my home page, and when I started it, I thought it would have no useful purpose but to allow me to vent.

When we moved back to Houston, I started seriously sending out résumés to small, suburban dailies, and within three weeks, I had a job as features editor at one of them. I am also designing web pages now. I had no idea that would become such a useful skill.

Even though we ended up on our feet, we also went through a period of incredible turmoil and pain. I personally know of two divorces in *Post* families, where the job situation added to the tension. There was tension in our marriage, too. I know of people who have gone through terrible times, like selling their houses right before they would have been foreclosed. The choice for most *Post* people was to leave town or to leave journalism.

I had to take a pretty significant pay cut myself, but at least I am still in journalism.

### Ellis Widner

I had been at *The Tulsa Tribune* about fifteen years and I was the features editor when the paper closed in September of 1992. But we knew it was coming, and I had already started to put out feelers. In fact, I went right into another job as entertainment editor of *The Philadelphia Daily News*. At that time, jobs were still out there, although there was a sense that things were tightening.

When you are laid off or your paper closes, you are not aware of how much you are reacting to the loss of a job and how little

you are using your inner good sense. So when someone offers you a job, you have a sense of pride as well as a sense of desperation. You are relieved because someone wants you. Like Sally Field at the Academy Awards, you say, "You really do like me!"

But all that can cloud your judgment. You have to open your eyes and imagine what it is really like to work at the paper that is hiring you. In Philadelphia, I was responsible for the entertainment coverage of the fifth largest city in America,

and I had much too small a staff. I found the layers of management in Philadelphia were like an onion. The more you peeled away, the more layers there were. And I did not have enough of a support staff.

When I decided to leave Philadelphia and take another job, I said to myself that I was going to be smarter this time. I was in touch with editors at *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Little Rock on a cordial basis the whole time I was in Philadelphia. And you can bet that I talked to a lot of people at the *Democrat-Gazette* before I came here. I called ahead, asking questions about what it was like to work there, how hard it was to get things done, and how cooperative people were.

I think the key, and it's something journalists don't always think about, is to use the same journalistic skills that you use on stories in looking for a job. Be gregarious, talk to everyone, use your research skills and study the paper's history. How have they treated the staff in the past?

I started here in May of 1995. I am part of a team of three editors who have created a new feature section called Style. I also edit weekly sections



Ellis Widner

focused on entertainment, and I write a weekly column. We are really a team, we respect each other, and it's a pleasure to work here. It's the best working situation I have ever been in.

### Denise Hamilton

**B**etween 200 and 250 people were laid off from the *Los Angeles Times* when I was let go last August. I loved working for City Times, the paper's weekly section about the central city. We thought we were so safe, for politically correct reasons. We thought the last place that would be affected by layoffs was inner-city coverage.

I had been at the *Times* ten years, and I had traveled to the Balkans on a Fulbright scholarship while I was at the paper. I had also free-lanced for other sections of the paper.

I cried and felt shock when I was laid off. But once the tears dried, I realized this was a great opportunity. They were pushing me out of the nest. Plus I got a year's salary as severance pay. So I tried not to take it personally. I looked at it as a real business decision. I got in touch with all



Denise Hamilton

DAVID GARZA

## "We thought we were so safe, for politically correct reasons."

sections of the *Los Angeles Times* — travel, business, real estate, Calendar, and Life & Style — and immediately lined up free-lance work. I had lots of story ideas. A month after I was laid off, I found out I was pregnant. I realized this was a God-given opportunity to slow down and assess where I was going. I am still in transition. I am applying for full-time jobs, but this is tiding me over while I explore other options. Getting laid off forces you to get out there.

I have also been free-lancing for publications such as *LA Weekly* and *Wired*. I have been writing for foundations, too. I have a lot of energy and I am able to juggle a lot of projects at once. I love to pitch stories, and I find it much more effective to query people over the Internet. It's a lot more intimate and fast. It also takes perseverance, so I just keep pitching. Right now, I have a lot of work.

### Lori Eisenberger

**C**hanging careers was what I call a no-brainer. I had worked eighteen years at *The News Tribune* in Woodbridge, New Jersey. I started there while I was a graduate student at New York University. I had been a clerk, a municipal reporter, a features writer, the education writer, and, as of last year, an education columnist.

It was the school of hard knocks. I worked my way up. I worked night shifts. I never missed work because of my kids. I only took off three months when they were born. When my daughter was two and had to have emergency surgery because she fell down the stairs and bit through her tongue, I left work for the surgery and then came back to finish my shift. When they called me last summer to tell me the paper was being sold, I was working at home in a wheelchair, with a broken ankle.

I was dedicated. I paid my dues. In my head, this was for life. I put out a hundred percent. But people don't appreciate dedication. The new owners of the paper, which was merged with another, chose not to hire me. In fact, eighty percent of the staff was not picked up.

I applied to a couple of other papers, but in the back of my mind, I was thinking it's time for a change. I am forty-one, and I refuse to go backward. No more working night shifts and weekends. My priorities have changed. They have shifted to my kids. I don't want to miss my kids growing up. And thinking that way, I wanted to do something that made sense.

Sure, I cried when I was let go because I loved my job. I felt rejected because they didn't want me. But becoming a teacher made perfect sense. I am already certified because I majored in English and education as an undergraduate. When I spoke to teachers as an education writer, I spoke to them as a peer. They felt comfortable and secure talking to me. Kids make you feel wonderful about yourself. They give back immediately, while in journalism, everyone is out

## "I was dedicated. I paid my dues. In my head this was for life. But people don't appreciate dedication."

for themselves. Teaching is much less competitive. You don't have to be a star. Everybody is working together and on the same team, helping the kids.

So the paper folded in October, and I started substitute teaching in my hometown district in December. By March, I had a full-time position. My specialty is middle school and high school English. The pay is excellent in education today and so are the benefits, including the pension. When I am sixty-five, I'll be saying this was the best thing that could happen to me. ♦

# COMES THE

by Rob Gurwitt

A few years back, a veteran state-house reporter in California named Ginger Rutland managed to roil the usually hard-to-impress Sacramento press corps with a particularly stinging backhanded compliment. "You've got to understand," she said as she addressed a public forum on the press and state legislatures, "reporters are lazy and stupid, but they're not venal."

Rutland had tarred with a single brush-stroke a diverse group of reporters — some of the state's best and some of its most lethargic. But there was truth in her words: like most capital press corps, Sacramento's has been, for all its bright spots, guilty on more than a few occasions of pack journalism, of uninspired coverage, of failing to dig beneath the surface to explain how power gets exercised. When the state's legislative leaders sat down with Governor Pete Wilson last summer to hammer out a budget, for instance, there were plenty of stories on what was in the budget, but next to nothing on how the state's most powerful deal-makers had actually arrived at their decisions on how to divvy up the state's resources.

In the end, Rutland's comments just got her colleagues in a lather; she was hounded for months afterward. Which is a shame, because the questions she raised about the quality of statehouse journalism — not just in Sacramento, but across the country — are about to take on considerable weight. And reporters who cover state government are going to have plenty of cause over

the next few years to ponder whether they're doing an adequate job.

The reason, of course, is that the people and institutions they cover are expected to take on a raft of responsibilities from the federal government. Republicans in Congress — and to some extent, Democrats in the Clinton administration — have made it clear that they intend to devolve power from Washington to the state capitals. Officials in Albany, Phoenix, Jefferson City, and elsewhere who once left such matters as welfare, Medicaid, and housing to Congress and the White House, are now going to be carrying a good share of the public-policy burden on those issues and conceivably others.

In fact, as much as congressional Republicans like to talk about a "revolution," states for the last decade have been taking a growing role in experimenting with fundamental changes in the way government operates. Health care reform, welfare reform, "reinventing government," the "property rights rebellion" — all were hot topics in state capitals before members of Congress and the administration got into the act, and the better local news organizations were already on top of them. And it is impossible to tell at the moment just how profound or long-lasting the impact of the current congressional ferment will be. "Maybe it will be a true revolution from D.C.," is how Dan Morain, a *Los Angeles Times* staff writer in Sacramento, puts it. "But I've heard that before."

Yet we clearly are, as a country,

## Power to the States! But are the media ready?

engaged in reshuffling the federalism deck. As a result, statehouse reporters will be faced with questions they really haven't had to worry about before. These will range from specific policy dilemmas, such as whether a state will fund nursing-home care for the elderly, to the broader issues of whether legislators and administrators can handle the new responsibilities they've been given and whether, indeed, those new responsibilities are all they're cracked up to be.

These are issues not just for state capital reporters. They apply equally to journalists covering national affairs who have grown accustomed to Washington as the political center of the country. Last spring, the *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen came out with the rather gloomy prediction that the national media would fail to boost their coverage of state and local government, for the most part because it's seen as being neither as interesting nor as prestigious a topic as Washington. "My guess," he wrote, "is that the Republicans in Congress know all this. When they send programs to the

Rob Gurwitt is a senior writer for Governing, the magazine of state and local government. He lives in San Francisco.

# DEVOLUTION

states they are, in effect, sending them over the horizon: let the states do what they want — and to whom they want. As with the proverbial tree that falls in the forest, no sound will be heard."

Cohen was worried about scandals going uncovered — the welfare block grant that somehow winds up paying for county roads, for example. And there is a lot more that the press will have to be looking at vigilantly. Will the states indeed engage in the much-predicted "race to the bottom" by scrambling to provide fewer welfare benefits than their neighbors? How do particularly innovative programs — or programs trumpeted as innovative — actually stack up? To what extent will the budgetary burdens that block grants impose wind up in the lap not of a state but of its cities and counties? As Dean Baquet, national editor of *The New York Times*, says of devolution, "If it happens, it's obviously going to be one of the big government stories of the next few years."

Some major news outlets have a head start. *The Wall Street Journal* has always paid some attention to state and local stories as illustrations of larger points, and in recent months *The New York Times* has made it a priority, as Baquet puts it, "to take the debate out of Washington and write about it around the country." The paper has done stories on welfare reform in Michigan and Mississippi, health care reform in Tennessee, and the overall capacity of state legislators to respond to new responsibilities — a story that many state dailies have so far ignored.

With the focus of big and medium-sized news organizations traditionally so much on Washington — and still there, in many editors' minds — national issues are handled sometimes by the Washington bureau and sometimes by regional bureaus. But as Alan Murray,

Washington bureau chief of *The Wall Street Journal*, points out, "The danger with shared responsibility is that no one feels responsible." Moreover, while national newspapers and news programs don't have much trouble generating stories from one state capital or city, they've never been especially good at putting them in broader perspective. That will change as national reporters build a state-by-state base of knowledge, but it will clearly take them time to become deeply familiar with the cross-section of states they'll need if they're to give an informed reading of national trends.

Which is where daily coverage of state capitals around the country comes in. If devolution truly happens, the quality of reporting coming from state capitals will become crucial not just to home-state audiences, but nationally as well.

**B**eyond the strengths and weaknesses of individual statehouse reporters lies perhaps the most critical unanswered question: How much urgency about coverage of state government will be felt back in the newsroom? You won't, obviously, find many daily news organizations that openly profess indifference toward what goes on in the state capital. The reality, though, is that over the last fifteen years or so, there has been a decided slackening of dedication to covering either the legislature or the executive branch.

The trend has been most noticeable with television. There are exceptions — most major stations in Dallas, Houston, and Austin, for example, have some sort of regular presence at the Texas capitol — but in many major state capitals around the country, from Albany to Springfield to Sacramento, television reporters are notable largely for their day-to-day absence from the scene. They show up for the big stories, such as

a death penalty vote in Albany, and for the crusade stories, like the vote on a tougher animal-cruelty law in the Washington State legislature after the mutilation of a zoo donkey by some children. But there are fewer television reporters with a working knowledge of state government than there were a decade ago. "There is a huge gap in how well broadcast outlets report on legislatures," says Yvette Garcia, executive producer for public affairs at KERA-TV, the public television station in Dallas. "A chief reason is that the staffing of reporters at these legislative bodies is thinning for broadcast."

There is a cost to that. Speaking of New York City outlets, Frank LeBrun, a columnist for the *Albany Times Union* and a local television commentator, remarked: "All the major television stations rely on affiliates for feeds. An issue like the death penalty will draw all the stations from the city on the day it's announced, but then they go away again. So the times that television will actually break something or explain a complex issue in a meaningful way for viewers are as rare as moondust."

Many news directors and station managers have found reasons to drop the statehouse beat, despite the fact that what goes on in state government affects everyone in their viewing audience.

The decision often comes down to money and glitz. State capitals don't seem to have enough of either. It's expensive to keep up a bureau, as well as to house a full production crew for the duration of a legislative session.

"What goes on in state capitals is generally not sexy, and is often far removed from the city in which commercial news operations are located," notes Michael Aron, the senior political correspondent for NJN, the New Jersey public television network. "Although things are

decided in state capitals that affect the lives of citizens, so are things at the city level, right under the noses of these people, and at the federal level, where tape is constantly being fed all day."

The picture with newspapers is more complicated. Nearly every major state daily has a capital bureau, and many second- and third-tier papers do as well, but even within the top ranks, there are great differences in the resources allotted. The range runs from the *Los Angeles Times*, with eleven full-time staff members in its Sacramento bureau, through papers such as *The Miami Herald*, with four capital reporters (and one regional writer based there), the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *San Jose Mercury News*, each with three, to the *Chicago Tribune*, which recently added a second reporter in Springfield after a two-year stretch with just one, and *The New York Times*, which maintains just one full-time reporter in Albany, though it adds two more during legislative sessions. By contrast, its Washington bureau has about fifty newspeople.

Many editors seem to be waiting for devolution to take hold before they decide whether to beef up statehouse coverage. "I've been doing essentially the same thing as the state — taking a wait-and-see approach," says Tom Brown, the government and politics editor at *The Seattle Times*. "It's pretty clear that there will be some fairly substantial impact, especially in social-service areas, but it's still unclear to me when that's going to happen, which programs it's going to affect, and what, in turn, that's going to mean for the kind of coverage we do."

Quality of coverage depends on more than sheer numbers of statehouse reporters, of course. For one thing, reporting philosophies undoubtedly count for more — the *Mercury News*, for instance, is generally regarded as more interested in probing into the workings of Sacramento than other California papers with bureaus of similar size. And many newspapers, particularly in states where the capital is within relatively easy driving distance of the paper's hometown, have been using beat reporters to broaden coverage of state

government. "It's not a bad thing," says Jim Simon, a regional reporter and former capital reporter for *The Seattle Times*, "to cover these issues from outside the perspective" of the state capital. Even so, he adds, "You don't have the whole picture if you don't know what's happening in the legislature."

There are clear benefits that size and a staff dedicated to the statehouse bring. With its large staff, the *Los Angeles Times* can afford to look for stories that are, as bureau chief Armando Acuña puts it, "a little cut above what everybody else is doing"; indeed, the *Times* recently created an investigative unit to examine how state programs and officials are performing. Conversely, notes Rick Pearson, the *Chicago Tribune*'s lead Springfield correspondent and its only reporter at the state capital until recently, small bureaus will have a much more difficult time breaking stories about performance. "Other than the loyal opposition, you have to count on the auditor-general doing audits of programs and keeping an eye on vendors," he says. "When you're on your own, you're subject to whatever independent people can find out." Moreover, a one- or two-person bureau that's expected both to cover state government and to follow stories into the community often ends up sacrificing one or the other. "The fewer people we had," says Jim Simon, "the harder and harder it got for me to get out of Olympia and around the state."

Then there's the issue of longevity. At one time, capital press corps were the domain of veterans, reporters who had been around for a decade or two or three. They are now clearly a disappearing breed, and these days it's not unusual to find a statehouse press room whose senior writer has been there at most seven or eight years, with most reporters staying but two or three.

There are some advantages to this change. "When I first started doing statehouse reporting fifteen years ago, the place was dominated by guys who'd been there twenty years who'd settled into real formula reporting," says Peter Callaghan, now the political editor for the *Tacoma News Tribune*, in Washington State. "I can't count the

number of times I'd be working on a hot story, and some guy would say, 'Oh, Christ! I did that in '58 and '65 and '70, you don't need to do it again.'"

But reporters who have a sense of history, who can clarify how long-running policy debates have progressed, will be crucial to the public's understanding of issues in a way that legislators themselves no longer can be in the term-limit age. Moreover, state capitals are complicated places, with their own language, their own customs, and their own, often convoluted, histories, all of which have a bearing on day-to-day coverage. "It takes years to develop sources," says Steven Fromm, a *Trenton Times* statehouse reporter. "People have to see your face every day. If they don't, when you ask questions, it's, 'Who the hell are you?' They're not going to risk tipping you off to something if they don't know you." As Nick Wilson, a longtime Arkansas state senator, once put it, newcomers "have to work at face value — and if you work with politicians, you know that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with what's actually going on."

A s devolution proceeds, news operations that have had a chance — and have chosen — to pay attention to some of the emerging complex issues will have a leg up. In Illinois, for instance, a long-running battle by Republican Governor Jim Edgar to get a federal waiver for Medicaid reform has given the state's capital reporters a lot of preparation for the devolution era. "I'm certain we've had more Medicaid slugs this year than the national desk," says Rob Karwath, the *Chicago Tribune* assistant metro editor in charge of politics.

"I've been in this business thirty-five years," says Sam Kinch, Jr., a statehouse veteran in Austin who now publishes a weekly newsletter on Texas politics, "and I have never seen anything that has the capability of causing so much change at the state level and so few reporters preparing themselves even by doing 'what-if' stories. What's going to happen is, all this stuff's going to pass, and one day some bureau chief is going to say, 'Oh! We've got to write about this,' and he'll have to send someone over to learn how to read the budget."

Power to the States?

# drowning in SHALLOW waters

by Gene Roberts

**O**ne of the most vivid images I carry in my mind from my editing years in Philadelphia is of a photograph. It was taken in the Pennsylvania state capitol in Harrisburg. The legislative chamber is far from full. But voting by electronic lever is taking place. One legislator obviously wants the vote to go his way. The picture shows him flat on his belly, spread-eagled across several desks. He is voting four times. His hands are pushing two levers. His feet are pushing two more.

I think of this picture often as it becomes increasingly clear that more and more regulatory and money control is being pushed out of the federal government and onto state and local governments. Some of these governments are so bad as to defy belief. Some are as good as it may be possible for any government to be. But good or bad, state and local governments are becoming vastly more important and significantly more newsworthy. This, as a result, should be a heady time for state and local newspapers. But it is not. Many, perhaps most, of these newspapers are weaker in staff, newshole, and commitment to governmental coverage than they have been in decades. A tragedy may be in the making for journalism and for democracy.

News coverage is being shaped by corporate executives at headquarters far from the local scene. It is seldom done by corporate directive or fiat. It rarely involves killing or slanting stories. Usually it is by the appointment of a pliable editor here, a corporate graphics conference there, that results in a more uniform look and cookie-cutter approach among a chain's newspapers, or it's by the corporate research director's interpretation of reader surveys that seek simple common-denominator solutions to complex coverage problems. Often the corporate view is hostile to governmental coverage. It has been fashionable for some years, during meetings of editors and publishers, to deplore "incremental" news coverage. Supposedly, it is boring, a turnoff to readers, and — what's worse — it requires newshole. The problem with all of this is that governmental news develops incrementally. And if you don't cover it incrementally, you don't really cover it at all. Incremental is what it is all about.

Governmental news may not be as gut-wrenching as rape, murder, airplane crashes, and other mayhem. But most of our serious readers take it seriously. It is the way — virtually the only way — they have to keep up with what is going on in government. And if newspapers miss a step along the path of legislation, then readers also miss a step and don't get to weigh in at the proper time. Supplying this part of the news fills a basic need of democracy.

Not only is substantive news coverage vital to democracy; it is, I think, vital to the survival of newspapers. As papers become

increasingly shallow and niggardly, they lose their essentiality to their readers and their communities. And this is ultimately suicidal.

Ample newshole and staff are the essential ingredients for building a loyal readership. Deprive editors of staff and newshole and they start taking shortcuts, making guesses as to the newsworthiness of events about which they can't possibly predict the outcome, and then cramming important stories into newsholes so tight that readers don't get all the details and, as a result, don't understand what really happened. Then the paper becomes dispensable. No longer essential to its hardcore readers — the serious ones. This cannot possibly be sensible business strategy for the long haul. For a simple reason: if readers and communities give up on their newspapers, so — in the end — will Wall Street.

Thirty-five years ago I worked for a state capital newspaper, the *News & Observer* in Raleigh, North Carolina, that was dedicated to covering state government. When the state legislature was in session we reported on every statewide bill that was introduced, and every local bill that applied to any of the approximately fifty counties in which the paper circulated. It was, let me make clear, a lot of work. It was not unusual in a single day to write three or four longish statewide stories, and then report on eight to ten local bills, giving them at least one paragraph each, and sometimes as many as five or six paragraphs. And these stories were well read. An example comes vividly to mind. One legislator introduced several bills incorporating new towns in his home county. And I wrote a little story about each bill. It would be nice to be able to say, in retrospect, that I knew something was amiss. But I did not. To the extent I thought about the bills, I imagined the legislator was turning small cross-roads communities into small municipalities. But the readers in the county read my stories and figured things out. North Carolina had a law that channeled a portion of the state's gasoline taxes into municipalities for street maintenance and construction. The legislator discovered how to profit from the law. He was incorporating plowed fields and woodlands, planning to let the taxes build up until he could put in free streets for future housing developments. But because the newspaper was diligent and thorough, the voters rose up and voted the legislator out. It was democracy in action — a newspaper and voters both living up to their obligations in a democratic society. ♦

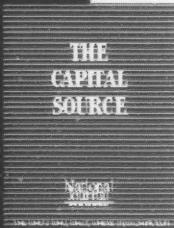
*Roberts is managing editor of The New York Times. This article is adapted from a lecture he gave earlier this year at the University of California, Riverside, as part of The Press-Enterprise Lecture Series.*



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# Chuck-gate

## When can journalists act like citizens?

**T**hings are not the same between me and Chuck. There he is on Channel 4, talking about the presidential campaign, his eyes still blue and sincere behind those IQ-accentuating glasses. But things have changed.

Chuck is Chuck Scarborough, a local news anchor in New York, a fixture at six and eleven on WNBC. Mostly he reads; sometimes he reports, as he did early last year in a twenty-part series about the roots and implications of the Contract With America. He's been around for twenty-two years, as dependable as a toaster and nearly as neutral.

Or is he? In February we learned that Chuck wrote a check for \$1,000 last year to presidential hopeful Steve Forbes, the maximum individual contribution allowed. As required, the Forbes for President team made this public in its filing with the Federal Election Commission, and the intrepid Associated Press took note. WNBC, embarrassed, announced that as long as Forbes remained a viable candidate, Scarborough would do no original reporting on the presidential race.

Soon, however, we learned that the anchorman had also given \$1,000 to Bob Dole '96. And as reporters burrowed deeper into FEC records, they found that Charles B. Scarborough III, a.k.a. Chuck, had donated to the Bush-Quayle reelection campaign in 1991 and to Republican Senator Arlen Specter in 1992.

Chuck-gate got a few inches of inside-page newsprint in New York — BAR CHUCK FROM ALL POLITICAL STORIES! said the *Daily News* — and a little airtime on rival TV stations. Scarborough wasn't talking, but WNBC faxed around a new statement, in which he acknowledged an "error in judgment" and the station extended his no-original-reporting ban for the rest of the campaign. Then we moved on.

Still, there remains a residue. Chuck is no longer reporting politics, but he's still anchoring. And as he tells viewers about his guys, Forbes and Dole, and about Buchanan, who is not his guy, and about Clinton, who is *definitely* not his guy, I listen for attitude in the lead-in, I watch for little arcs of the eyebrow. Chuck has been unfaithful, somehow. It's not quite the same.

But unfaithful to what, exactly?

This issue of what journalists ought to be able to do as citizens is hardly a closed debate, including the part about political contributions. Many of us frown on such contributions, but we do not all operate from the same invisible contract. As Cal Thomas, the syndicated conservative, pointed out in a column during Chuck-gate, nobody made much of a fuss when Ed Bradley of *60 Minutes* and Charlayne Hunter-Gault of what

was then *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* were found to have chipped in (\$500 and \$700 respectively) to L. Douglas Wilder's Virginia gubernatorial campaign back in 1989. Beneath the bromides about political neutrality there is ambiguity and disagreement. Journalists know that credibility flows to some degree from a commitment to objectivity, but they're less certain about how far to carry that commitment into their private lives.

It's easy, in fact, with the FEC's electronic database, to find mainstream journalists at objective news outlets who, like Chuck, contribute to politicians. You merely search by the name of the news outlet. It's difficult, on the other hand, to judge people's reasons and rationales.

Julia Cheever of San Francisco, for example. Cheever is a staff reporter for Bay City News Service, a wire outlet for radio, television, and newspapers. She covers federal and state courts, and she gave \$1,000 to Clinton in 1992 and the same in 1995, as well as contributing to local campaigns. "You could argue that almost every reporter covers politics in some way," she says. "Even a food writer could cover something about USDA requirements. An arts reporter could be reporting on the fate of the National Endowment for the Arts." The logical extension of that — for Cheever at least — "is that you have to leave it to the personal judgment of the reporter as to what's a conflict. I would not report on a campaign to which I'd contributed. Conversely, I would not contribute to something that I was going to report on. But in my case, politics comes into the lawsuits, trials, and court matters that I cover only very, very peripherally." She did not discuss her contributions with her editors.

Paul Goldberger, who also gave \$1,000 to Clinton, makes a similar distinction. The chief cultural correspondent for *The New York Times*, Goldberger believes that journalists have a right to "life as a citizen" and ought to be able to "separate out their personal preferences" as they go about their work. He does draw lines, however. If he were reporting on politics, he says, "that's a very different matter. That would put an unnatural degree of stress on the challenge of objectivity, and it would give an appearance" of a lack of objectivity. Even if a political reporter can remain objective, "it sure looks like he can't" if he's donating money, Goldberger says. Following that logic, he does not donate to cultural institutions, which could bear directly on his beat. (*The Times's* written policy

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apparently allows less wiggle room than that, however. The sentence in the paper's long conflict-of-interest policy that seems to apply says "Staff members may not work for or contribute to projects associated with or commissioned by news sources of the *Times*."

Judith H. Dobrzynski, a business reporter at *The New York Times*, also takes rules about credibility and objectivity seriously. She doesn't vote in primary elections, for example, because as a New York resident she would have to register in a political party to do so. "I don't want to be identified with any political party," she says. "And I never contribute to political candidates." Those are her own

rules, she says, not her employer's. "I don't know what *Times* policy on this is, to be honest. This is personal. Who knows what I might be called to cover?"

Yet Dobrzynski does contribute to a political action committee — the Women's Campaign Fund, a Washington-based PAC that gives to women of both parties, as well as some independents. She gave \$1,000 last year and her fellow reporter on the *Times* financial desk, Leslie Wayne, gave \$300. "It doesn't affect my reporting," Wayne says. "I had some reservations before I did it — 'Oh my gosh, I'm a journalist and now I'm writing a check' — but the fact that it is nonpartisan gave

me comfort. I have no idea exactly who winds up with the money. But I believe in the cause."

Indeed, the Fund is not without an agenda. It gives only to "progressive" women candidates, by which it means women in favor of abortion rights. Fund spokesman Michelene Kennedy Carter says that being pro-choice is the only criterion other than gender that the Fund applies. Dobrzynski says the Fund's criteria are broad enough to satisfy her. "Women have a hard time raising money, being taken seriously in the political process," she says. "I owe it to my gender to help them catch up."

Freelancers turn up on the FEC database too; Linda Solomon, for example, a respected former investigative reporter for the Nashville *Tennessean*, who thinks that in her newspaper days she was naive about objectivity, that she thought she was objective but she wasn't. "I did a series on public housing, and I don't think the public housing director thought I was objective. The insurance industry certainly did not think I was objective. I came with a strong sense of right and wrong, and I wrote from that place. And that's why it was powerful." Solomon gave \$250 to Clinton/Gore '96 and gave them \$1,000 in 1992. While she was at the *Tennessean*, she did not donate to politicians, but she would if she worked there today. "Absolutely," Solomon says. "We're in some serious times. I can't just sit back and watch."

Retired journalists turn up as well, including some who have interesting tales. Blair Clark, for example. At seventy-eight, Clark has left a clear record of his political leanings — campaign manager for Senator Eugene McCarthy in 1968, editor of *The Nation* from '76 to '78 — and he also makes contributions: \$1,000 to Clinton this year and another \$1,000 to the National Committee for an Effective Congress. But he was for part of his life a correspondent for CBS News and later its newsroom general manager. "I'd much prefer the European system, where you identify your biases and weave your facts around them," Clark says. "But that's not the American system. I'm sort of a left-wing Democrat, but I suppressed all that when I was in the objective world. I don't think that's any great trick."

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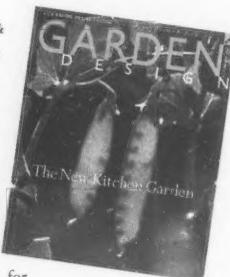


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Nor, he says, is suppressing the outward signs of political bias, such as contributions to a political campaign: "Reporters should not be identified with any cause whatsoever — not the ACLU, not anything." Except . . . "I'll tell you a little secret," Clark says. "In 1960, my friend and classmate of Harvard 1940 was running for president. I gave \$1,000 to a mutual friend; she gave it to John Kennedy's campaign. He was really a close personal friend — what was I gonna do? But it couldn't be known."

Yet when Clark was general manager of CBS News, between 1961 and 1965, he was charged not only with following the code of journalistic neutrality but also with enforcing it — particularly in terms of what reporters put into their pieces. "In enforcing it, we lost Howard K. Smith," Clark says. Smith did a documentary called *Who Speaks for Birmingham?*, Clark explains, and he "wanted to end it with a quote — that Edmund Burke thing, about how all it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. I had to tell him it was a violation of CBS standards, that it was editorial. He demanded a meeting with Paley" — CBS's founder, William Paley — "and Paley told him to get lost, so he quit. He was an old friend, now an ex-friend, I'm afraid."

Howard K. Smith recounts the incident in his new memoir, *Events Leading Up to My Death*. In Birmingham, he writes, after watching Freedom Riders beaten by Ku Klux Klan members — in clear coordination with Bull Connor's cops — Smith recalls, "I had the strange, disembodied sense of being forced by conscience to write what I knew would be unacceptable." Later he gave Paley a paper arguing "that giving equal weight to Bull Connor and to Earl Warren and leaving it at that was equivalent to saying that truth is to be found somewhere between right and wrong, equidistant between good and evil." But the incident marked the end of Smith's CBS career, to the objective and subjective Blair Clark's regret.

How many journalists make political contributions? It's not easy to tell. According to the FEC's database, 137 self-described journalists contributed \$88,002 on the last presidential election cycle, in '91-92. And as of early this April, forty-six "journalists," fifty-four

"editors," and fifteen "reporters" (the number excludes obvious court reporters) had contributed \$73,285 in the '95-96 cycle. These numbers are wildly unscientific, partly because some of the self-identified journalists are not part of the world of mainstream objectivity. (For example, Henry Grunwald, former *Time* magazine editor in chief — \$1,000 to Dole '96 and \$1,000 to Bush '92 — writes essays for *Time* these days. Essays, of course, are supposed to include opinion; another contributor, one who gave to the Iowa Republicans, is the "journalist" Patrick J. Buchanan.) In addition, people are identified by occupation in the FEC's databank only by bureaucratic accident. The FEC

asks contributors to list both occupation and place of employment, but when the information is transferred from paper to the electronic database, "occupation" is entered only when "place of employment" is left blank. So given that these numbers are a count of people who improperly fill out a form, it's a good bet that they underestimate the number of self-described journalists who give their money to a political candidate.

Back in journalism school, in the middle of Missouri, I remember reading news coverage about Watergate in the objective-but-Democratic *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the late objective-but-



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# CJR INTERNSHIPS

Applications are now being accepted for the fall program. Interns will work closely with editors on a wide range of research, writing, and production projects.

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Gloria Cooper, Managing Editor  
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Republican *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, and wondering if they were covering alternative realities. St. Louis has just one big daily now, so its reporters carry an even heavier burden, it seems to me, as they seek the trust of readers of many stripes.

Still, objectivity will always be relative, and maybe because nailing it down is like nailing Jell-O, there is no true consensus about what we must do to appear to be objective. We are pulled in two basic directions. The Newspaper Guild's model-contract language on the "outside activity" issue — what reporters are allowed to take part in off the job — is simple: "An employee shall be free to engage in any activity outside of working hours."

Would the guild, if asked, defend the right of a journalist to contribute to a candidate? "Sure," says Larkie Gildersleeve, the guild's director of research and information. "Let's say it's a reporter. The reporter's work would have to be the criterion you look at. If the reporter's work continues to be objective, then there is no problem, is there?"

At *The Washington Post*, there would probably be a problem. The conflict-of-interest part of the standards and ethics rules at the *Post* is also simple: "We avoid active involvement in any partisan causes — politics, community affairs, social action, demonstrations — that could compromise or seem to compromise our ability to report and edit fairly." And Leonard Downie, Jr., the paper's editor, is objectivity's avenging angel.

Famously, Downie takes his political neutrality so seriously that he doesn't vote. His reasoning is less well known: for Downie, the issue is less about appearances than about not choosing. "The act of voting means deciding that somebody ought to be president," he says. "I don't want to make that decision in my own mind." What if he finds himself attracted to a particular candidate or a particular policy? "What I try to do is to say, 'What is the other way of thinking about it?' I would urge myself as a professional to look at the other side." The editor says he takes his position because he is the *Post's* "final gatekeeper," and although he does not demand the same standard of his employees, "I would be happy if our reporters did not

vote." Downie says he doesn't even know who his wife votes for, because they don't discuss it.

A bit radical for me. Can reporters hold passionate opinions? I don't think they can help it; not the ones I know. But what can they do with them?

At some point far distant from Downie in this debate is former CBS producer Jon Katz, who wrote recently in *Wired* magazine that the whole principle of journalistic objectivity, as the headline put it, is "obsolete." Katz has a vision of a new age in which reporters say what they *really* think and readers and viewers shoot back, in some giant e-wired national dinner party.

Or screaming brawl. Personally, as a news consumer, I don't actually want to know what Tom Brokaw really thinks. I want to know what he and his staff are able to find out about the world that they think is significant and interesting. I don't expect them to gather facts in some mechanically random way, or to forget who they are as they arrange those facts and pick which ones to emphasize or omit. But I do expect them to wrestle with their biases and to compensate for their blind spots, to be not only fair (which I would expect even from a journal of opinion) but objective — detaching themselves as best they can from their political passions. In return, more or less, I'll trust them.

But it's hard, and they could *help* me trust them, on and off the job. There are gradations and distinctions to be made, of course. A reporter who donates is one thing, and an essayist is another; a movie critic is something and a foreign correspondent is something else. Is friendship an honorable reason to give money? Or a cause, like black solidarity or abortion rights? Or a flat tax? It's a bit like art. I'm not sure *exactly* where the line is, but I know what I don't like.

Insiders at WNBC tell me that Chuck Scarborough has some hand in shaping Channel 4's newscast, that he makes no secret of his conservative feelings, but that, at the same time, he's a professional who "knows that there's two sides to a story, or three or whatever."

So I'm supposed to give Chuck the benefit of the doubt? He shouldn't hold his breath. ♦

## Covering Those Forgotten Judicial Races

**A**s another campaign season gears up, we tend to forget that the American people periodically judge their local judges too, at least in the forty-two states where voters decide who sits or who stays on the bench. And voters often don't have much information to go on when they cast their ballots.

The reason is that the press usually doesn't cover judicial races, at least not in the depth that it covers races for local legislators or mayors. Covering judicial campaigns is especially challenging in the approximately twenty states in which judges stand for retention in unopposed elections. And in all states, the code of judicial ethics can be an obstacle, often limiting what judges are allowed to say.

Despite the challenges, the press can do a better job of providing voters with useful information on the performance of judges and the qualifications of judicial candidates.

What follows is a list of public records that reporters can use to measure judges against such criteria as independence, impartiality, integrity, court management skills, legal knowledge, judicial conduct, and accountability. The documents are equally useful for beat reporters in covering courts and for investigative reporters in checking complaints about judges.

**CAMPAIN CONTRIBUTIONS** Almost all states require reports from candidates, which provide useful information on interest groups that are major contributors. An example: a month before the 1992 election, *The Dallas Morning News* analyzed major contributions to state Supreme Court candidates. The newspaper reported that one incumbent judge received 81.5 percent of his money from lawyers, mostly those representing plaintiffs seeking personal-injury awards. The opponent, an appeals court judge, received 38.6 percent of his money from lawyers, mostly from firms that defend business, insurance, and medical interests.

**FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE** Almost all states require full-time judges to make financial disclosures to protect against conflicts of interest. Reporters can track a judge's net worth over a period of years. If an increase in net worth is inconsistent with a judge's pay and income from listed assets, the reporter should seek an explanation. A reporter also can check listed assets, such as real estate and stock holdings, against cases handled by the judge. Did the judge step aside where personal interests might conflict with impartial adjudication?

**CASELOAD STATISTICS** In this day of computerization, virtually all states and many individual jurisdictions publish data on cases filed, disposed of, and pending. Is the judge moving cases along in a timely fashion?

Two-thirds of the states have adopted time standards — some mandatory, some voluntary — on disposing of different types of cases. *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, using Ohio Supreme Court guidelines, reported in a 1993 story that Hamilton County judges had the biggest backlog of overdue cases among the state's six most populous counties, and a half-dozen judges had backlogs that were twice the state average.

**DECISIONS REVERSED** Most judges are reversed occasionally on appeal. The question for reporters is whether the incumbent has been reversed an unusual number of times or for unusual reasons. Appellate court decisions are generally published in bound volumes called state case reporters and are available on-line through LEXIS and WESTLAW.

**COURT DOCKET AND CASE FILES** These are particularly useful for checking the accuracy of complaints against a judge. Does the judge show favoritism in repeatedly assigning the same few attorneys to lucrative cases? Does the judge sit on cases involving former law partners or campaign contributors? Has the judge dismissed charges against prominent citizens without adequate explanation?

**DISCIPLINARY COMPLAINTS** Has the judge been disciplined for violating the Code of Judicial Conduct? Has the lawyer-candidate been disciplined for violating the Rules of Professional Conduct? Rules vary from state to state on when disciplinary proceedings are made public.

**INTERVIEWING THE CANDIDATE** Judicial candidates, of course, are not allowed to say how they would rule in specific cases. But they certainly are allowed to discuss their views on the administration of justice, and more and more they are allowed to discuss substantive issues, such as diversity on juries, legislative sentencing guidelines, racial or gender biases in sentencing, trying juveniles as adults, or the effect of "get-tough" laws like "three strikes and you're out."

*Foley, a veteran editor and reporter, is an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. A longer version of this article will appear this spring in *Newspaper Research Journal*.*

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# A-Hunting We Will Go



by James Boylan

The original blood sport was hunting, and the blood sport that underlies James B. Stewart's chronicle of the Whitewater troubles is a hunt as well. The theme is set forth tersely in two sentences from the torn-up note found in Vincent Foster's briefcase after his suicide: "I was not meant for the job or the spotlight of public life in Washington. Here ruining people is considered sport."

The sport to which Foster referred has proved deadly indeed. He did not live to see the firestorm that engulfed the Clinton administration in the second half of 1993, the

#### **BLOOD SPORT: THE PRESIDENT AND HIS ADVERSARIES**

BY JAMES B. STEWART  
SIMON & SCHUSTER  
479 PP. \$25.

"unending succession of scandalous allegations" ranging from purported Whitewater peculations and cover-ups and criminal referrals through Hillary Clinton's commodities trading, Troopergate, Paula Jones, and Foster's death itself. His suicide occupies a central role in Stewart's narrative, not only as a focus of controversy but as a symbol, a reminder that real blood, real lives are at its heart.

When Stewart was initially invited by an associate of the Clintons to undertake this task, he was promised the cooperation of Bill and Hillary Clinton, but that promise

faded away, and the voices that dominate are those of more forthcoming interviewees, particularly Jim and Susan McDougal, the Clintons' partners in the Whitewater development, and Bernard Nussbaum, former counsel to the president.

These interviewees, and Stewart's research, provide revelations, but they are tepid — for example, the since-challenged assertion that the Clintons overstated the value of their Whitewater holdings on financial statements now a decade old. Clearly, the book is aimed less at creating or reviving scandals than at measuring the human wreckage left in the wake of Bill and Hillary Clinton's route from Arkansas to Washington. Whether the Clintons were responsible for the wreckage — whether, in Maureen Dowd's comparison, they were spiritual siblings of Tom and Daisy Buchanan of *The Great Gatsby*, who broke things — or were to an extent victims themselves, is best decided by the individual reader. Presumably any rise to power leaves disorder in its wake, but the record presented here — indictments, jail terms, bankruptcies, damaged lives, a suicide — is extraordinary in breadth and in the apparent inability of the principals to understand why they are in trouble.

Beneath the main narrative, almost like an undertow, is an account of the players of the blood sport — the pursuers — at work toppling reputations and, conceivably, administrations as well. The Whitewater chase has attracted a variety of participants, unacknowledged teammates, strange bedfellows. The scandals have been stimulated by the efforts both of extreme partisans and purportedly disinterested mainstream media — the former openly seeking

*James Boylan was CJR's founding editor. His previous analysis of Whitewater coverage appeared in the January/February 1995 issue of CJR.*

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political advantage, the latter operating on the principle, apparently, that the airing of allegations of sin is good for the body politic.

In the cast of roughly one hundred that Stewart lists at the start, twenty-one qualify as hunters. Most notable among them is Jeff Gerth of *The New York Times*, whose somewhat flawed story on Whitewater during the 1992 primary campaign is recognized as the seed from which the scandal sprouted, and who (with Stephen Labaton and Dean Baquet) later unveiled the story of Hillary Clinton's commodities trading. There is also Christopher Ruddy, then at the *New York Post*, who made a full-time specialty of conspiracy theories about Foster's death. And David Brock, whose lurid version of Troopergate for *The American Spectator* overshadowed the more sober account in the *Los Angeles Times*. And David N. Bossie, field scout and merchandiser for the anti-Clinton scandal factory Citizens United. (See "Churning Whitewater," CJR, May/June 1994.)

Within mainstream news organizations, Stewart shows, investigative reporters eager to be at the cutting edge often had to struggle against the doubts of higher-ups. Gerth himself had two stories killed by the *Times* high command — one during the campaign based on allegations by Jim McDougal, the other (written with Stephen Engelberg) in 1993 on the accusations by the rogue judge David Hale. In these cases, according to Stewart, the *Times* editors preferred the word of the candidate/president over that of "a manic-depressive failed S&L operator" or an "about-to-be-indicted person."

Similarly, Bill Rempel and Douglas Frantz of the *Los Angeles Times* had to undergo uncomfortable contortions before they got the trooper story into print. Initially, they were cautioned by national editors not to tell Jack Nelson, head of the Washington bureau, about the investigation, lest he leak to the White House. When they brought in their story, the editors danced around it so long — and let Brock and *The American Spectator* get so far ahead — that Frantz was so infuriated that he eventually quit and moved to *The New York Times*.

Among the most fascinating aspects of the media story was the degree of cooperation between Ira Silverman, a producer for NBC News, and Bossie, including joint trips to sources and sites in Arkansas. At one point, Silverman even left an interviewee believing that Bossie was an NBC journalist. A *Washington Post* reporter, Sue Schmidt, tipped off Jim Leach, who was pushing the Republican effort in the House to investigate Whitewater, to an important piece of material, hoping for a comparable favor. The *Los Angeles Times* trooper investigation was stage-managed by Cliff Jackson, an avowed Enemy of Bill. With the same targets in their sights, partisan and nonpartisan sometimes became all but indistinguishable.

Although Stewart uses such terms as "media explosion" (for the reaction to disclosure of the removal of files from Foster's office) and "press frenzy" (Treasury Secretary Bentsen's term), he fails to capture the full mania and obsessiveness of press behavior in late 1993 and early 1994. True, he notes the ferocious editorial-page campaign of Howell Raines of *The New York Times*, but lets *The Wall Street Journal* off too easy. Sophisticated Washington readers, he proposes, brushed off the *Journal's* attacks — the notorious "Who Is . . . ?" series — on the new Arkansans in the capital "with varying degrees of indignation and amusement." Only the victims failed to be amused. Oddly, while Raines is prominent in the media cast, his *Journal* counterpart, Robert L. Bartley, is not listed, or mentioned, at all.

In a book that is not long on interpretation in the first place, Stewart does not pass judgment directly on the news media's role in creating and maintaining the Whitewater scandals. But in his prologue, he suggests that partisans kept the scandals alive, "all but forcing the mainstream media to devote resources, print space, and airtime to exploring the most unsavory questions surrounding the Clinton presidency." This is a familiar enough thesis, a twist on the truism that scandal eventually leaks from the sensational to the conventional media. But the proposition suggests a reluctance on the part of the

mainstream media that they failed to demonstrate; indeed, they often led the way into the Whitewater quagmire, or at least plunged in at the same time as the partisans.

The exposure of corruption in high places is a grand tradition of American journalism. But the media behavior portrayed by Stewart is only marginally in that tradition. The investigative journalism of the 1990s, as glimpsed here, is willing to enter into dubious alliances and to let allegations substitute for conclusive findings in its impatient pursuit of quarry. At the same time, its frantic efforts have failed to persuade a majority of the public that any issue of importance is at stake. Indeed, a recent ABC News/Washington Post poll shows more than two-thirds of those questioned wish that the media would give Whitewater a rest. For whose benefit, then, is this deadly game being played?

## The Night Stalker

by Howard Kurtz

Ted Koppel stormed out of ABC's Washington bureau, furious at his executive producer for approving so frivolous a program. *Nightline*, after all, was supposed to be devoted to high-minded matters, congressional debates and foreign policy and the like, and here a show on rising unemployment had been scrapped for one on the death of a mere comedian, John Belushi.

When Koppel returned a couple of hours later, he was told that none of Belushi's friends could be persuaded to appear that night. The best that the bookers could do was land an aging comedian who had once done a gig on *Saturday Night Live* and chatted with the late star. Soon Koppel received an urgent call from the guest in Los Angeles.

"Ted?"

Howard Kurtz, a Washington Post reporter, is the author of *Hot Air: All Talk, All The Time*.

"Yes."

"Milton Berle. What the fuck am I doing on your show?"

*Nightline* has always had to ply its journalistic trade in an entertainment culture, first pitted against the undisputed king of late night, Johnny Carson, and more recently against Letterman and Leno. More than a decade after the Belushi debacle, *Nightline* would be swept away by O.J. Simpson mania, devoting fifty-five

examining how Koppel & Company have managed to pull this off.

This engaging book about sixteen years of *Nightline* is by Koppel and Kyle Gibson, a former producer for the

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### NIGHTLINE: HISTORY IN THE MAKING AND THE MAKING OF TELEVISION

BY TED KOPPEL AND KYLE GIBSON

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COURTESY ABC NEWS

*Nightline* executive producer Tom Bettag; head booker Dan Morris; senior producer Richard Harris; and Koppel, interrogator-in-chief

programs to the seemingly endless saga, blowing off Bob Packwood's resignation and the Mexican peso crisis for a chance to rehash the day's testimony, just like Larry King and Geraldo Rivera and every other talk show in the land.

Despite these occasional bows to popular culture, *Nightline* is an unalloyed success, the closest thing to a gold standard in television news. Born in the throes of the hostage crisis in Iran, the ABC News program has proven what few believed at the time, that it is possible to attract a mass nighttime audience for serious news without a lot of bells and whistles. Koppel has proven himself the best live interviewer in the business, and *Nightline* has become the forum of choice for diplomats engaged in global negotiation and embattled public figures trying to save their necks. In an era marked by shout shows in which supposedly serious journalists trade insults, harangue guests, and boldly predict the future, it is worth

program, but the double byline is essentially a marketing device. Koppel is candid enough to admit that while he frequently consulted with his collaborator, "in the final analysis Kyle wrote it." This brings a certain degree of detachment to the inevitable self-congratulations involved in such an effort, and as the Berle anecdote suggests, the warts are not hidden. But it also deprives the book of a consistent voice, depicting Koppel in the third person in the manner of, say, Bob Dole talking about Bob Dole.

The result is less a narrative than a highlight reel, a series of well-crafted anecdotes and stories, sometimes padded a bit too thickly with chunks of transcripts that probably made for better viewing than reading. Still, there are glimpses of the team effort that enables *Nightline* to produce high-quality taped reports and interviews night after night. What emerges is a sense of how *Nightline* has repeatedly made electronic history, from the drama in Tehran (an excuse for ABC



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Caryl Rivers

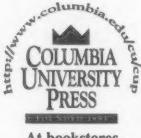
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News president Roone Arledge to hijack a half-hour time slot) to tense moments in South Africa, Israel, the Soviet Union, and China, to high-stakes faceoffs with Geraldine Ferraro, Michael Dukakis, and Bill Clinton.

Not all the programs were quite so memorable. A segment on the "style" of George Bush's presidency, featuring Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times* and Alessandra Stanley, then of *Time* magazine, turned "stupefyingly dull" (in the authors' words) when Koppel stuffily insisted on exploring such matters as U.S. troop levels in Europe. "We've sort of run out of things to say," Koppel declared as the show dragged on. "We'll catch fire when we come back in a moment," the host promised. Finally he thanked his guests, saying: "We must do this again one day . . . Not too soon." (Koppel later apologized to the women for his rude behavior.)

And then there was the night when a man who reviewed school textbooks for offensive material announced he had found one volume that "encourages women to masturbate using a peeled cucumber." What America made of this revelation is impossible to say, except for a group of Smith College women who wrote to thank Koppel for the information.

The most compelling chapters — those in which Koppel's voice is most clearly heard — deal with the challenges and pitfalls of the live interview, a venue in which the editing, such as it is, has to be done in front of the audience.

Here is Ted with tobacco industry lawyer John Strauch: "I must congratulate you, you evade answers about as elegantly as anyone I've ever had on the program." With Gary Hart: "Senator, forgive me. There's a certain hypocrisy inherent in what you're saying here." With Evan Meacham, then the governor of Arizona: "No, no, Governor. I tell you what . . . let's play by my rules for a moment, let's play go back to the question that I asked you initially and which, it seems to me, you evaded the first two or three times that I asked you." To Al Campanis, the baseball executive who had to resign for suggesting that blacks have inferior management skills: "That really sounds like garbage, if you'll forgive me for saying so." Still, even Koppel concedes that with a skilled politician or diplomat,

"I don't care how good an interviewer you are, there's a limit to what you can achieve in eleven minutes."

Sometimes Koppel goes over the line, as he did in turning a 1984 interview with Ferraro, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, into a high-handed oral exam on the finer points of military strategy. "Yeah, but we're talking facts here, Ms. Ferraro," Koppel snapped at one point. Rick Kaplan, then the executive producer, told Koppel in his earpiece: "Tomorrow you're going to hate this. You're going to be embarrassed by what you're doing now." Koppel kept charging ahead. "This was almost as if I was running against him," Ferraro said later. (Perhaps the former congresswoman learned something from the experience, since she has now signed on as the co-host of *Crossfire*, the latest politician to seek refuge in the talk-show world.)

What is most fascinating about *Nightline* is its role as a national show trial for public figures in trouble, from Jim Bakker to Kurt Waldheim. When Gary Hart, after the Donna Rice episode, wanted to get back into the presidential race, he turned to Koppel (and negotiated the first face-to-face interview on a program that preferred the mystique of keeping the guests at remote locations, even if it was just down the hall in Washington). When Dukakis was trailing badly in the '88 campaign, he subjected himself to the *Nightline* ordeal (and looked so utterly beaten that when Koppel said "I still don't think you get it," the campaign staff was thoroughly demoralized). When candidate Clinton was being pummeled over the release of his thank-you-for-saving-me-from-the-draft letter, he tried to explain himself on *Nightline*. When Lani Guinier, in a move that angered administration officials, was trying to salvage her nomination as assistant attorney general for civil rights, she pleaded her case with Koppel. (The president dumped her the next day anyway.)

In an earlier era, such people might have courted party leaders or wealthy backers or newspaper columnists; now they take their case to the television audience, with Koppel as interrogator-in-chief. The verdict is rendered by the rest of the media, which pay close attention to *Nightline* even as it reduces their role to that of theater critics. Still,

the inherent suspense of an electronic confrontation provides "a moment of emotional intimacy," in Guinier's words, that no newspaper interview can match.

The history of *Nightline* is intertwined with the explosive growth of technology, the satellite feeds that have made global debates commonplace and enabled Koppel to link up adversaries in real time. Both Winnie Mandela, while her husband remained in prison, and Corazon Aquino, the day her husband was murdered, were able to reach an international audience through *Nightline*, even though they lacked access to the

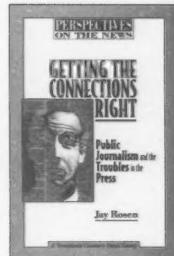
media in their own countries. No Israeli and Palestinian officials had ever debated each other in public until they did so on a stage with Koppel, television's secretary of state, separated only by a ridiculous-looking three-foot wall that the host had to keep vaulting. This sort of thing has become the program's signature. The very first edition of *Nightline*, after all, forced Iranian official Ali Agah to confront Dorothea Morefield, wife of one of the American hostages. (The program did this by ambushing Agah in a maneuver that would be familiar to fans of Jenny

## Is THE PRESS THE PROBLEM?

The latest in the Twentieth Century Fund's PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEWS series explores public journalism through the eyes of one of the leading shapers of the movement.

### GETTING THE CONNECTIONS RIGHT PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND THE TROUBLES IN THE PRESS by Jay Rosen

It's time for journalists to do more than report the news, Rosen argues. "There are limits to the stance of the observer in journalism, but the American press has no philosophy that takes over when those limits are reached," he writes. "Public journalism provides one." But it need not mean boosterism or selling out to market-driven content. Rather, Rosen summons the press to help revive civic life, improve public dialogue, and fashion a coherent response to the deepening troubles in our civic climate—most of which, he believes, implicate journalists.



The public journalism movement that Rosen has helped shape has been the subject of increasing controversy in the news business, with most of the criticism coming from people who have no idea what public journalism might mean. Anyone curious about the potential—and risks—of a new approach to reporting should read *Getting the Connections Right* to see what the furor is all about.

JAMES FALLOWS, author of *Breaking the News*

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Jones and other daytime talkers. "A little bit shameless," Koppel admits.) There is plenty of juicy behind-the-scenes color here — Boris Yeltsin once canceled a scheduled *Nightline* interview by refusing to leave a hotel bar — although the narrative takes on a war-story quality after one too many retellings.

One *Nightline* weakness is a tendency to reach for the usual white-guy suspects in Washington and New York. The reason that *Nightline* prefers these professional talkers — many of whom can be seen gabbing away on other talk shows — is explained by Dan Morris,

head of the booking unit: "Every booker has an innate fear of real people. You just never know. Will the guest freeze up? Will this be a deer-in-the-headlights situation?" The problem, of course, is that the overused Rolodex constricts the range of political views and lends a scripted quality to the debates.

Indeed, what was rare when the program began in 1980 — politicians, academics, and journalists chewing the rhetorical fat on evening television — now occurs in quadraphonic sound, on CNN and CNBC and countless other cable channels. *Nightline* has kept itself

fresh by expanding its boundaries — more investigative reports, day-in-the-life stories, and town meetings — but it still faces the challenge of being heard above the din.

The tiresome approach of too many talk shows is to book two guests — Johnnie Cochran and Marcia Clark, say, or their political equivalent, James Carville and Mary Matalin — and let them go at it. But most issues are far more complicated than this left/right, rock 'em/sock 'em dichotomy would suggest, which is why so much television talk is superficial chatter about who's up and who's down. *Nightline* often breaks the mold, bringing on guests who offer differing perspectives rather than high-decibel partisanship. If Koppel can keep blazing this trail and avoid the likes of Milton Berle, he will prove that news can be entertaining without sending in the clowns.



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## Dollars by the Barrel

by Steve Weinberg

What contributor has given the most money to U.S. Senator Bob Dole since he expressed an interest in becoming president of the United States?

The surprising answer to that question (read on, it's coming eventually) says a lot about the contemporary state of money in politics. That the answer comes from a Washington, D.C., research center says a lot about the coverage of money in politics by journalists.

Too many campaign finance stories ill serve their audiences. At one extreme, the stories are dry recitations of statistics: Politician X raised \$2 million during the past year and spent \$1.8 million of it, while her opponent raised \$800,000 and spent \$750,000. That type of story has

Steve Weinberg, a contributing editor to *CJR*, lives in Columbia, Missouri. His most recent book is *The Reporter's Handbook: An Investigator's Guide to Documents and Techniques*.

traditionally failed to explain why one candidate outraised and outspent the other, the strategy behind the spending, who contributed, and what those contributors expected in return.

At the other extreme, stories suggest Avenal and maybe illegal activity: Politician Q received a \$5,000 contribution from an out-of-state tobacco company, then several months later voted to increase subsidies to tobacco growers. Those stories suggest cause-and-effect — contribution A led to vote B — without exploring the possibility that the contribution came only after the politician had favored such subsidies year after year.

A few journalists and academics have written excellent books before now about money in politics, going back to 1932 when Louise Overacker published *Money in Elections*. In 1983, Elizabeth Drew, while writing for *The New Yorker*, turned her knowledge of campaign finance into *Politics and Money*. Then came Brooks Jackson, currently with CNN, with his 1988 book *Honest Graft*. Organizations devoted to educating the world about campaign finance include Common Cause, the Center for Responsive Politics through the outreach of its National Library on Money and Politics and its primer *Follow the Money Handbook*, as well as the Federal Election Commission, a federal agency blessed with Kent Cooper, possibly the most helpful public-affairs bureaucrat in the history of the republic.

But despite such resources, lots of coverage is wrongheaded, or downright wrong. *The Buying of the President*, put together by Charles Lewis, a former producer for *60 Minutes*, and the staff at his Center for Public Integrity, ought to change that.

Although it focuses on the 1996 contenders for the White House, almost every page contains a valuable lesson for coverage of any politician (updates are available on the center's Internet Web site, <http://www.essential.org/cpi>). Perhaps the overarching lesson: the most shocking stories are not found in the realm of illegal behavior, but rather in what's legal.

Which brings us back to the Dole question posed earlier. At the time the center completed its research, Dole's

number-one patron was the Ernest & Julio Gallo Winery of Modesto, California. Total giving to his campaign, including his political action committee: \$381,000. Total giving to two Dole-sponsored foundations technically separate from his campaign apparatus: at least \$890,000. Grand total: well over \$1 million. Surprised? I was.

The Gallo ranking raises obvious questions. Why would a California

#### THE BUYING OF THE PRESIDENT

BY CHARLES LEWIS AND  
THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY  
AVON BOOKS  
271 PP. \$10.

winery care so much about a senator from Kansas who has spent most of his political career in the legislative minority party? The center's staff found some answers. Let's take just one example of what the Gallo family wanted as a return on its investment in Dole. It involves a tax matter innocuously labeled a generation-skipping transfer:

"By its name, no one could really tell that it was legislation tailor-made for two California gentlemen getting on in years who just happened to produce one out of every three bottles of wine purchased in the United States. As part of the 1986 tax reform bill this 'transfer' tax measure — which eventually became known as the Gallo Amendment — would save . . . \$104 million in inheritance taxes when . . . Ernest and Julio Gallo died and their heirs received the money.

"Dole, who was then Senate majority leader, a senior member of the tax-writing Senate Finance Committee and a member of the House-Senate conference committee on the 1986 tax bill, received \$20,000 in one day from the Gallo family . . . With the help of others, the provision passed."

**T**he Gallo Amendment illustrates why what's legal is often a good story. Some other points raised by Lewis and his researchers:

- Out-of-state constituents, far from Kansas, pay Dole enough so that he often is busy tending to their narrow interests, leaving him less time for the working men and women in Wichita or for farmers in their wheat fields. Of

Dole's top ten career patrons, only one is based in Kansas. The Center for Public Integrity documents Dole's attention not only to the Gallo Amendment, but also to defending the Market Promotion Program, an agricultural subsidy favored by the Gallos; settling a dispute between the Gallos and the U.S. Treasury Department over champagne labeling; and other disturbing examples involving other out-of-state career patrons. Any time a journalist notices a contribution from somebody ineligible to vote for the recipient, it is legitimate to ask what the contributor expects as a return on the investment.

- The Gallos have channeled the bulk of their contributions to the Dole Foundation and Dole's Better America Foundation, entities outside the official campaign apparatus. Donations to such foundations, which are sometimes little more than slush funds for the candidate's personal use, are more difficult for journalists — and voters — to uncover. That is precisely why so many politicians establish organizations that fall outside the disclosure laws. It is up to journalists to ferret out such

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organizations by checking state incorporation repositories, not-for-profit income tax returns filed with the Internal Revenue Service, and relevant lawsuits.

- Dole made promises to contributors that went unheard by the general public. To the Gallos, for example, he vowed to oppose financing health care reform through higher taxes on alcoholic beverages; publicly, however, he refused to discount the idea of higher taxes on alcohol. Journalists need to dig out information on the normally invisible campaign by asking questions about what goes on behind closed doors.

- The Gallos bundle contributions from family members, winery employees, lawyers, lobbyists, and other people under their sway; the bundling enables them to circumvent legislated limits on individuals. The best journalists understand the loopholes as well as they understand the law.

- The Gallos have made contributions year after year, decade after decade. Because most journalists look at just one year or election cycle when writing about incumbents, the large accumulations escape notice.

- The Gallos have made so-called "soft-money" contributions to political parties and other organizations that eventually benefited Dole, and on which there are no limits. Because few journalists outside Washington, D.C., pay attention to party organizations, they often miss the soft-money contributions.

- The Gallos have donated money to other candidates of both major political parties. The family is listed among the top ten career patrons of Bill Clinton (\$50,000) and Pete Wilson (\$314,671), as well as Dole. This is known as hedging your bets.

The dominance of the rich in political campaigns is pervasive, going beyond the race for the White House. Gallo family members, for example, are among the 1 percent of the population contributing around 77 percent of the money going to congressional campaigns. As a result, the members of that 1 percent have a disproportionate impact on who is elected, as well as on policymaking once those elected assume power. By any definition, that's a big story.

## SHORT TAKES

## UNHAPPY HOUR



When I was a child, the gargoyle drinkers would come swimming through the Press Club bar to grasp my father's hand and buy him drinks, or have him buy them. Sometimes my mother would be there at the Press Club, either in the small lounge off the front lobby that was known as the Tampax Room (because it admitted women) or in the (women-allowed) rear dining room, which I always hated, far in the back of the club, a sort of steerage, the equivalent of the back of the Maryland roadhouse where the blacks would do their drinking, begging drinks from the white bartender through the hole in the wall.

The men's bar had about it the twilight muzz of an alcoholic brain, a certain slow-motion depressive air. The gargoyles were men who had, I vaguely understood, lost their jobs as Washington correspondents for papers like the New Orleans *Picayune* but somehow managed to hold on to their Press Club memberships and to pay their bar bills. I suppose there was a much larger tribe of those who had lost their jobs and did not keep the bar privileges but faded and died as drunks do or else perhaps sobered up and were seen no more in the Press Club bar in any case.

FROM **HEART: A MEMOIR**, BY LANCE MORROW. WARNER BOOKS. 323 PP. \$22.95.

## THE GRAY LADY IN RED

The *New York Times* of the fifties was called "moderately conservative" by such papers as the Quincy, Massachusetts, *Patriot-Ledger* and "mildly liberal" by reporters I met years later. Still, tales of Communist perfidy at the *Times* were not unusual: in the late forties Arthur Krock, the profoundly conservative Washington bureau chief, complained steadily to Sulzberger about the "pinkos" being published in the *Times* Book Review. Krock kept writing Sulzberger to give examples: Henry Steele Commager had reviewed John Gunther's *Inside U.S.A.* and Robert Sherwood's *Roosevelt and Hopkins*; John Kenneth Galbraith had written about a Twentieth Century Fund study of American resources; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., had reviewed a book by the Republican Harold Stassen. Krock's charges against his own paper were not quite as crude as those which filled the FBI's files, but the spirit was similar. Under the heading of COMINFIL INTO THE "NEW YORK TIMES" a 1955 memo referred to the Sunday editor Lester Markel as the "number one pro-Communist" on the paper; other memos reported that Louis Budenz had said that the music critic Olin Downes and the dance critic John Martin were Communists, a notion which would have dumbfounded their colleagues. Yet both critics were in the Security Index: the FBI's list of people who would be arrested and sent to detention camps if an "internal security emergency" occurred.

The FBI files contained material offered by a couple of informers on the *Times* and their "suspicions of Communist sympathies" on the part of members of the staff. It was noted that "against the orders of his superiors," a young man on the makeup desk "ordered a larger headline for the obituary notice of Mrs. Earl Browder, the wife of the former Communist party leader." A "strong pro-HISSL attitude," a college friendship with "a campus Red," a group of printers "whispering among themselves," "suspicions [based] upon

snatches of conversation . . . overheard at adjoining tables in the cafeteria" — all were duly recorded and preserved in the files. In July 1953 Hoover was informed that fifty-two people who'd worked for the *Times* had been "subjects of security investigations."

FROM PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE 1950S, BY NORA SAYRE. RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS. 462 PP. \$37.95.



## HOW NOT TO CHEW THE FAT

The locale of an interview is important for atmosphere and privacy. Better on the subject's home ground than in a company office because conversation can be freer and with fewer interruptions. Restaurants are poor places to conduct interviews, unless you can find a quiet corner where the cutlery isn't rattling and the maître d' isn't coming over every few minutes to ask you if everything's all right so far, sir — on tape. I also happen to dislike what I think of as gastronomic interviews, where the interviewer tells the reader what the subject ate and food is used to break up quotations ("She ordered a second Perrier with a lime twist, nibbled on her shrimp salad with sesame seeds, then continued . . ."), as if some major character revelation were hidden on a lunch plate.

FROM WORDS STILL COUNT WITH ME, BY HERBERT MITGANG. W.W. NORTON. 320 PP. \$25.

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"I'm sorry, I don't . . ."

"My whole family's been sick all night," the voice croaked. "I'm only just able to come to the phone even now . . . A whole pint couldn't have been right . . . not with avocados . . . and sardines. We're all horribly ill, thanks to you . . . the dog worst of all . . . My husband says that if you don't publish an apology in your next issue, he's . . ."

"I'm afraid this is my first day here," Louis said. "All I can do is take your number and ask someone to call you back." But with an exclamation, that could have been retching, the line went dead.

FROM EVERYONE'S GONE TO THE MOON, A NOVEL BY PHILIP NORMAN. RANDOM HOUSE. 356 PP. \$25.



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*The Des Moines Register* 12/14/95

## Crew is safe, but researchers crushed

*San Jose Mercury News* 2/26/96

## Former Car Dealer Dies In Mid-Sentence

*The Caledonian-Record* (St. Johnsbury, Vt.) 2/20/96

## Police officer wrestles lurching patrol car away from baby

*The Oakland Tribune* 3/10/96

## Dad wants 3 charged for sex with daughter

*The Dallas Morning News* 2/29/96

After his speech, the governor, accompanied by six children, his entourage and dozens of reporters, climbed out of his pool to pace along his chain-link fence, occasionally standing on his hind legs and tilting his head back.

*Los Angeles Times* 2/28/96

## Pesticides blamed for fewer deaths

*The Press Democrat* (Santa Rosa, Cal.) 3/17/96

## Worker sold to competitors, police say

*The Times Herald Record* (Middletown, N.Y.) 2/22/96

## Lucy Ann Stops 1935-1996

*The Sheridan (Wyo.) Press* 3/4/96

■ In Alexander Cockburn's March 11 "Beat the Devil," Anna Taylor was erroneously identified as a bookmaker. She is a typesetter.

*The Nation* 4/4/96

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*The Daily Universe* (Brigham Young University) 1/22/96



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